REN & STIMPY!

#122

FROM MIGHTY MOUSE TO MARVEL'S REN & STIMPY —
DAN SLOTT
CONVERSATION WITH A COMIC WRITER

A RAP WITH TV'S
BILL WRAY
REN & STIMPY (THE REAL STORY)

GOLDEN AGE GREAT
MARC SWAYZE
FROM CAPTAIN MARVEL TO THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS!

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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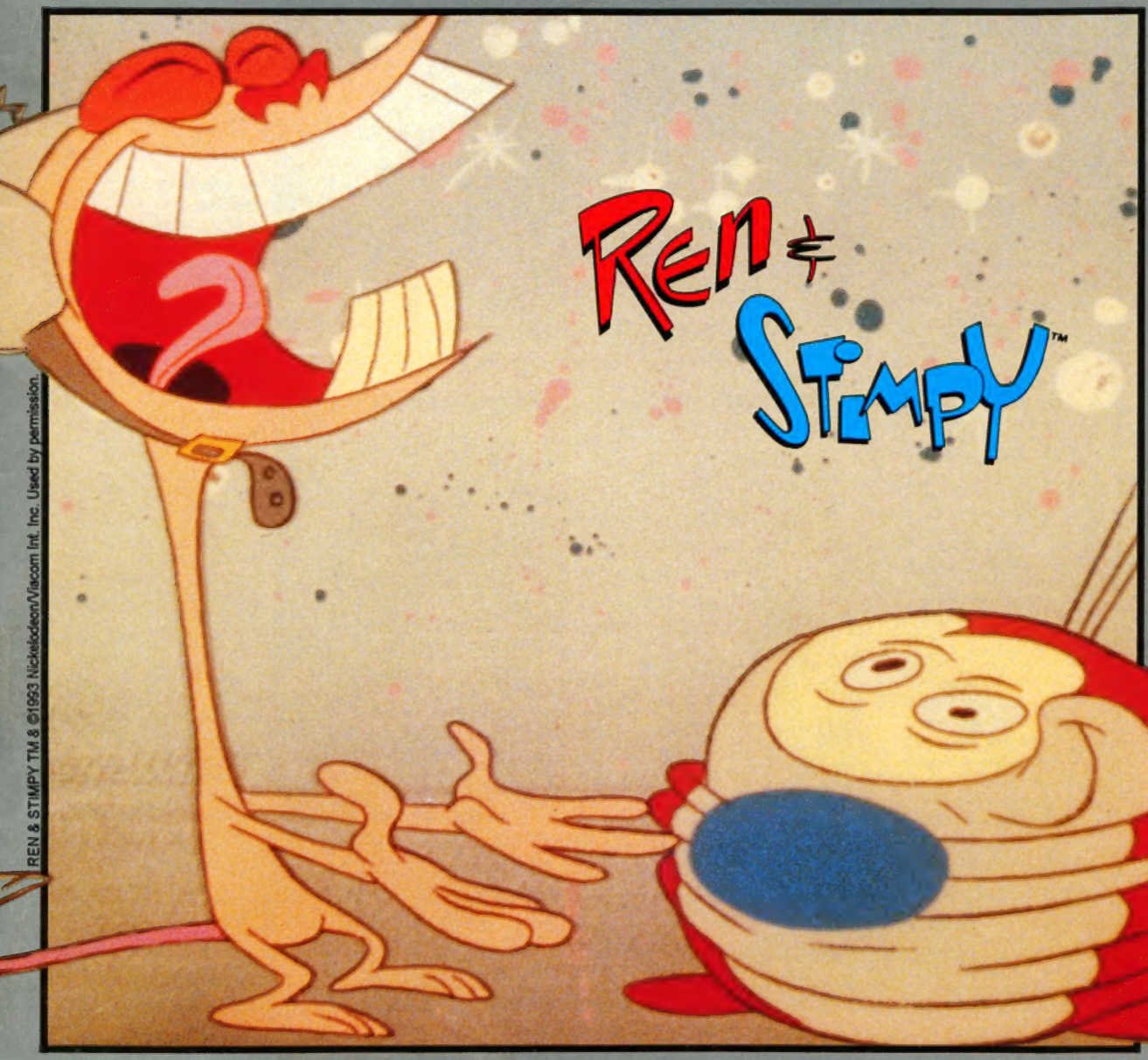

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Written by Randy Stradley (*Aliens vs. Predator*), penciled by Doug Mahnke (*The Mask*), inked by Randy Elliott (*Justice League*), with color cover by Doug Mahnke.

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The Nevada desert is the last place one would expect to encounter five demons from another dimension. It's also the last place the demons expect to run into their deadliest adversary: King Tiger! It's five against one, but Tiger has a secret weapon — a '63 Ford Thunderbird! Written by Randy Stradley (*Aliens vs. Predator*), penciled by Paul Chadwick (*Concrete*), inked by Jimmy Palmiotti (*Vigil*), with color cover by Geof Darrow (*Hard Boiled*).

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CREDITS

david anthony kraft's
COMICS INTERVIEW

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT
editor/publisher

conceived by
JIM SALICRUP
editorial and design consultant

DARREL L BOATZ
CHARLES S NOVINSKIE
associate editors

JOHN PIERCE
PAUL POWER
contributing editors

MACHINE WOLF GRAPHICS
art & tone direction

DON MARKSTEIN
typography

JILL CLEEF
SALLY GARLAND
T GORTEL
D HAMILTON
Y A QUIN
production

GARY GUZZO
PATRICIA JERES
ED O'NEAL
DEB TOFFOLI
DAVID WEIGEL
RENEE WITTERSTAETTER
special thanks

TRICKY TREAT THING
peepster

POLO BEAR
pupster

SLAM & ED
out to pasture

J R MATHER
international marketing director

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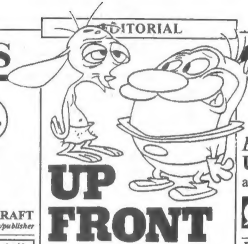

UP FRONT

REN-AISSANCE AND STIMPY

Comic books are undergoing a renaissance of sorts, thanks in part to the potential for crossing over into other media. Indeed, comics are increasingly showing up as the next hot movie or TV property.

And vice versa: Blockbuster movies such as JURASSIC PARK also help demonstrate the flexibility of the medium as new fans are introduced to comic books through the adaptation of such movies into comics.

REN & STIMPY are in the middle of that renaissance as they combine the media of television and animation into a ready source of new readers for comics. In order for any television series to survive it must draw many millions of viewers — a staggering number when compared to comic-book circulations. Translate those numbers of hungry REN & STIMPY fans into potential new comic-book readers and it's easy to see how multi-media crossovers can be the key to a prosperous comic-book industry, an industry that some analysts predict will top the one-billion-dollar mark in sales for the first time ever during 1993.

The current trend towards movies or TV series based on comics and comics based on movies or TV series, plus the perfect match-up inherent between animation and comics, makes REN & STIMPY a natural part of this renaissance!

— Charles S. Novinskie

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"I wrote a strip called THE NUKED SURFER."

DAN SLOTT

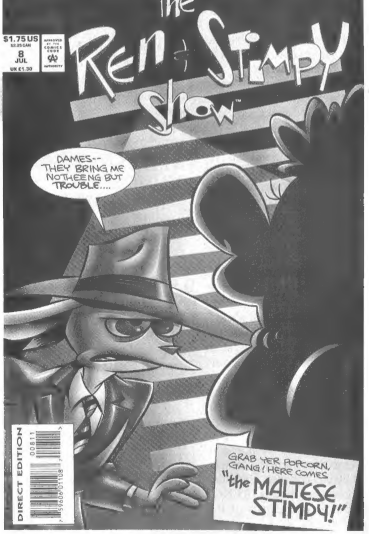
One of the hardest tasks in comics has to be working on a licensed product, especially when that product is THE REN & STIMPY SHOW, licensed for use by Nickelodeon. Under the watchful eye of editor Fabian Nicieza, writer Dan Slott scribes the adventures of Ren & Stimpy for Marvel Comics.

For the uninitiated, Ren is a hyperactive chihuahua with a German accent. Stimpy is a droopy, silly sort of cat. Together Ren & Stimpy make up a fun-loving team that have taken Nickelodeon and Marvel Comics by storm.

Never knowing what to expect, the first issue of THE REN & STIMPY SHOW comic for Marvel came polybagged with a set of Ren & Stimpy air foulers that smelled like, well, wet chihuahua and kitty litter. And it only gets weirder from there.

Writer Dan Slott fills us in on what it's like to work on Ren & Stimpy . . .

Dashiell Hammett move over! Dan and artist Mike Kazaleh send Ren and Stimpy into the "comic-film noir" with their 8th issue.



CHARLES S. NOVINSKIE: *How was it you ended up getting the assignment on the REN & STIMPY comic?*

DAN SLOTT: It's a long story.

CHARLES: *That's okay, we have the time.*

DAN: My first writing job was for **Fabian Nicieza.** I was a college intern for Marvel. Actually, I really wasn't a college intern for Marvel, I lied. *(Laughter.)* I was writing a comic strip for my college paper called THE ADVENTURES OF THE NUKED SURFER. It was about a guy in a post-apocalyptic world that surfed off of nuclear afterblasts.

After I graduated college the paper was still receiving a lot of mail about the strip so I basically hung out around the college and worked on the strip. I kept drawing and writing the Surfer and someone asked me why I hadn't shown my stuff to anyone. So I showed my stuff around but no one was interested; the art was so bad. I'm not an artist up to par with comic books but the art was okay enough to fool college kids with. *(Laughter.)*

I was in New York for a wedding so I decided to drop in at Marvel and impress everyone with my portfolio. No one was interested in it the least bit until someone finally asked, "Hey, kid, you here for the internship program?" It was like, "Yeah, that's what I'm here for." *(Laughter.)* They had a policy that you had to be in college and receiving credit for the internship so I had a professor friend write a recommendation and say I was receiving

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Dan Slott.
Born: July 3, 1967, Berkeley, CA.
College: Occidental of Los Angeles.
Influences: In comics: Stan Lee and John Byrne. Also, the storytelling of O. Henry, Rod Serling, Steven Spielberg and Anton Chekhov.

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"I did a lot of things at Marvel looking for that Big Break."

credit — even though I had already graduated.

CHARLES: *So you got on at Marvel through the internship program. Who did you work for?*

DAN: I worked for **Fabian Nicieza** and **Evan Skolnik.** It was really a blast working with them.

CHARLES: *So after the internship you ended up working on staff for Marvel?*

DAN: That's a story in itself. I was finishing up my internship when a position came open. The only problem was that even though I was perfect for the position they couldn't give it to the college intern — because they thought I was still in college.

CHARLES: *Let me guess. The next day you show up at Marvel with a diploma in hand, ready to go to work.*

DAN: You got it. That's pretty much how it worked out. *(Laughter.)* College intern by night, college graduate by day! I did a lot of things at Marvel looking for that big break. I pestered Fabian until he let me do the MIGHTY MOUSE letter column, because I saw that as an in. I did my level best to make the letter column the funniest part of the book to show off my sense of humor to Fabian. I then pitched Fabian on some MIGHTY MOUSE stories and he actually bought one. In my typical deadline fashion I got the story in to him within a year. *(Laughter.)* Unfortunately, MIGHTY MOUSE was scheduled to be cancelled with issue #9 and my story was slated for issue #10. The story was already finished so Fabian fought real hard to get the story published. He said, "I don't care if it only sells 18,000 copies, it's a damn funny story." To Fabian's credit he pushed the book through, issue #10, and it was a big hit. The book even made USA TODAY and was on PERSONALITIES, a sort of late-night ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT show. The book received a lot of good press, which was great because it was my first published comic-book story. It took a year but it had, like, five jokes in every panel. It was also my first time working with Mike

Panels from the 8th issue of Dan's comic, THE REN & STIMPY SHOW.

I DON'T CARE EEF EET EES "MOVIE NIGHT!" I DON'T WANT TO WATCH YOUR STEENKIN' FEELM!
JEEZ MAN, EET'S NOT EVEN EEN TECHNEEECOLOR!
BUT REN, THE MAJESTEE STIMPY IS MY FAVORIT' MOVIE IN THE WHOLE WORLD!
CLICK
BOING
OH, WHAT A SHAME!
NOW WE WON'T GET TO WATCH YOUR LEE! CEENEEMATIC TREAT!
GUESS WE'LL JUST HAVE TO TURN IN.

"Hopefully we will do more PTM. I want to do a

Kazaleh and we worked so well together that we were brought back together as the creative team on REN & STIMPY.

CHARLES: *So that was how you broke in. Who assigned you to the REN & STIMPY book? Was that your next assignment?*

DAN: Fabian liked my MIGHTY MOUSE stuff. Issue #10 was funny stuff and well received. Fabian was looking to do a Nickelodeon book which he planned as a giant anthology. Fabian envisioned it having Doug, the Rugrats, basically a giant potpourri of all of the Nickelodeon properties in comic form. Fabian pegged me and **Mike Kazaleh** to do eight-page installments of REN & STIMPY, because he liked our work together on MIGHTY MOUSE.

I liked the idea of working on REN & STIMPY because I like the animation and attend the animation conventions. I saw the short, BIG HOUSE BLUES, which I believe was the pilot. After seeing just that one short I came up with a lot of different storylines. People who know me know that I'm really ambitious, and if I'm working on a proposal, I'll come up with, like, three years of storylines. I had a lot of story concepts for all of the characters, but then Nickelodeon nixed the idea of an anthology book. They did like the idea of a REN & STIMPY solo book. Fabian checked back with me and asked if I was still into the REN & STIMPY comic and I told him sure. I told him I had 20 million storylines down on paper, so he gave me the job.

CHARLES: *Do you have free reign of the characters, or do you have to run*

storylines past Nickelodeon?

DAN: We started off with everyone poking their finger in the pot. Nickelodeon checked everything with the licensing department, stuff like that. Everyone was very helpful at first. In issue one, I had a scene where Stimpy had to make a moral decision as to whether or not to steal the Kitty Krappa 5000. Originally, in my plot, I had a little angel Stimpy and a devil Stimpy appear. Will **McRob**, one of the show's writers, said, "That's impossible, Stimpy doesn't have a devil Stimpy." We kibitzed a little and decided to make it a devil Ren. I have to admit that after I watched a few episodes on TV, the characters had grown since BIG HOUSE BLUES — they weren't the same characters. Ren and Stimpy had evolved with all of their own little traits and quirks; it made the characters much more fun to write.

Nowadays, when Nickelodeon reads the stuff, it's less of the input that I'd like it to be. It's less of the, "Let's give him a devil Ren" input; it's more of the "I don't know about that story" type of input. *(Laughter.)* To be fair with Nickelodeon, I think with the original batch of synopses, which puts us up to issue 12 or 13, they only nixed a few.

CHARLES: *Can you give us a few examples of the types of stories they didn't okay?*

DAN: They killed the story titled STIMPZILLA where Stimpy mutates into a giant beast and destroys the city. Ren has to activate the giant Ren Hoek robot that is like a giant ultra-Ren. They felt it wasn't right and that it was out of character. Looking back at it, they were right. I don't want to make the same mistake MIGHTY MOUSE made as a book. MIGHTY MOUSE alienated the non-comic-book-fan reader by making every issue tied to Marvel or DC continuity. Things like Saymore, the Subplotter, or Mices on Infinite Earth. They were funny issues, but if you didn't read comics you were left in the dark. I didn't want to make that same mistake. That's not right. It was a mistake. Let's just say I didn't want to take REN & STIMPY in that direction. Heading in that direction would have alienated the REN & STIMPY fans.

CHARLES: *Basically you wanted a wider appeal than just the comic-read-*

story about Powdered Toast Boy and his pup, Crusto."

ing fans?

DAN: Right, and we only went that direction once, in issue #6. We wanted to get it out of our system and it will never happen again.

CHARLES: *That was the CLASH OF THE TITANS issue.*

DAN: "CLASH OF TITANS, BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS." Nickelodeon got worried, and even though it was only a one-time usage and fair game, they asked us to write Wheaties. Wheaties said, "Very funny, good luck with your comic, but don't use the title." We changed it to "Breek fest of Chumpions."

CHARLES: *As of this interview (late April) issue #7 is on the stands.*

DAN: Right, that's the KID STIMPY issue. It's also the YAK SHAVING DAY storyline in which there is a storyline involving a telethon to raise money for fake beards for pre-teen yaks. Getting back to stories that were killed by Nickelodeon, one story was CHUMMING CHUMPS, in which Stimpy wanted Ren to teach him to fish. *(Laughter.)*

CHARLES: *I guess we don't have to say any more about that issue.* (Laughter.)

DAN: I have to tell you why they killed the CHUMMY CHUMP story. At the end of the story, Ren was going to let Stimpy fish by himself. Stimpy hooks a nuclear sub, gets hauled inside, and launches the nuclear missile, setting off a nuclear holocaust. The final page, a full-page splash, every single character in the world is rising to Heaven, and in the foreground, angel Ren turns to angel Stimpy and says, "You eediot, you bloated sack, you destroyed the world." Nickelodeon felt it was too dark. They didn't want to give the kids nightmares over nuclear holocausts.

CHARLES: *And it didn't leave much for a next issue.*

DAN: That's the point about REN & STIMPY. Fabian realized I was killing them off in every issue. *(Laughter.)* They were thrown into the vacuum of space . . . thrown off a cliff . . . blown up by a bomb. By issue four Fabian said I couldn't kill them anymore. *(Laughter.)* My original ending for issue four, the giant hairball story, had Ren & Stimpy dying.

CHARLES: *Killing off characters and bringing them back to life is a comic-book tradition.*

DAN: True, but that's the point; Ren & Stimpy aren't comic-book characters. It's like no one cares . . .

CHARLES: *There's no point to it. Kill them off, fine, as long as they're there next issue . . .*

DAN: Not even next issue. They'll be back in the next half of the same comic book! *(Laughter.)*

CHARLES: *How are sales on the book doing?*

DAN: Sales are going up and up. Number six, the Spider-Man issue, did have the best sales. Issue six sold more copies than adjectiveless Spider-Man in which the Punisher co-starred.

CHARLES: *So it sounds like we won't be seeing an issue of REN & STIMPY 2099.*

DAN: Absolutely not. I can't stress this enough. No more superhero crossover material, no X-STIMPY or THE RENISHER. Nothing like that. Hopefully we will do more Powdered Toast Man stuff. I do want to do a story about the adventures of Powdered Toast Boy with his powdered toast pup, Crusto.

I want to keep REN & STIMPY as broad-based as possible so that anyone can jump in.

CHARLES: *Where do you draw your ideas from? I read somewhere that there was going to be a "Stimpy's Hygiene Hints."*

DAN: Those never saw the light of day. Originally, I was going to do a piece on how to take care of your uvula, until someone at Nickelodeon remembered a long monologue about the uvula on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE. They felt it had already been done, and they were right.

I have a terrible fear that kids will try and do half the things they see in REN & STIMPY. When I was in high school in

"My childhood is my greatest draw for ideas.

London I wrote for the school paper. I wrote about some high-school kids that were arrested for riding on the back of a subway train. I thought it was a great article about how stupid it was. I had a fear that the kids would read the article and that they would want to run out and try it. That's my fear with REN & STIMPY. I hope I'm not writing any hey-kids-go-out-and-play-with-matches stories. I am writing in some of my worst things from my childhood. In issue #12 I teach kids how to play teacher bingo. It's an awful thing and I felt bad about doing it, but it had to be done.

CHARLES: *Can you fill us in as far as what teacher bingo might be?*

DAN: If you have a class you don't like with a teacher with a lot of mannerisms, you draw up a 4x4 grid and write all of the mannerisms in each square. As they use each mannerism you fill in the square. When you fill in a line you stand up and yell "Bingo." Read REN & STIMPY. We're going to teach kids lots of fun games to play.

CHARLES: *Any fears about writing REN & STIMPY?*

DAN: Just that I'm afraid that I'll run out of my childhood. My childhood is my greatest draw for ideas for REN & STIMPY. Most of the ideas just come out. I can't explain the creative process. When I draw a blank I just draw on all of the stupid things I did in my childhood.

In issue #10 I'll teach kids how to make La Brea Tar Pit Sundaes. I loved making them as a kid. Basically, lots of ice cream with hot fudge and animal crackers stuck into the fudge. *(Laughter.)* I'm ripping out my childhood and it hurts whenever Nickelodeon rejects my childhood.

CHARLES: *Speaking of Nickelodeon, I assume you watch the show?*

DAN: I do.

CHARLES: *Do you draw any ideas from the show?*

DAN: Well, no, other than the fact that we try to make every issue one episode. You get two stories, some filler material, and a goodbye sequence.

As an intern I watched MIGHTY MOUSE grow. I was there from the inception and I finished by writing the last issue. I use that book as my blueprint to draw upon to see what worked and what didn't work. I loved the book and I thought it was funny, but it played off the audience in a certain way. I've learned from the book. Let me put it this way — I feel that it is my obligation, when working on a licensed property, to make it as much like the original form of the property as possible. People that are buying the book, for the most part I'm sure, are people who have seen the show and are buying the comic book because they expect to be entertained in a similar fashion.

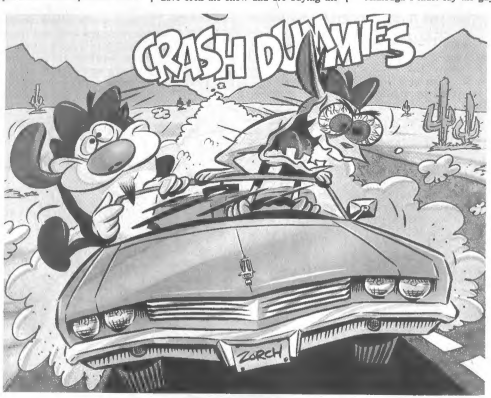
I don't care if I'm writing REN & STIMPY, ALIENS, or PREDATOR, if it's a licensed character it's my job to provide that character continuity. You're going to get **Dan Slott** spill-off, but you'll also get the continuity. On REN & STIMPY you get my spill-off and **Mike Kazaleh's** spill-off. In issue #3, where Ren is doing all of the odd jobs, my plot read, "Ren gets a bunch of yicky jobs — have fun, Mike." So everything he's doing on that page is **Kazaleh** humor.

CHARLES: *There's been a lot of press concerning the way Nickelodeon treated John Kricfalusi and his eventual release from the show. How do you feel about that?*

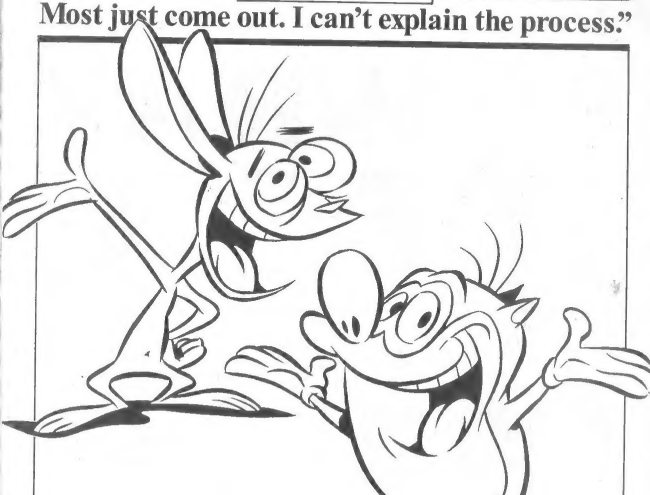
DAN: How about the Knicks? *(Pause.)* That's my way of saying I have no thoughts on the subject. When I work on the comic my bible for the comic book is the cartoons themselves, not the politics. Not that I don't care about how they're made or the politics — I just want to stay with the basics.

If you're a kid in the Midwest watching REN & STIMPY, and then you pick up the book, you'll love it. You don't need to know who **John Kricfalusi** is or **Bill Wray** is, you'll love the book.

Although I must say the guys are ge-



Most just come out. I can't explain the process."



niuses for creating the characters. I just try to stay away from the politics. I try to aim for the first season as far as a bible goes.

I can't tell you how much fun it is to work on the book and to have it as a regular assignment.

CHARLES: *Tell me a little about plotting sessions. Who comes up with the wild ideas and how long do they take?*

DAN: Boy, that varies. Some stories come to me overnight; others come from sessions with Fabian and **Carlos Lopez**, Fabian's assistant.

One of the funniest stories was the location for the pizza story in issue #2. Originally, I had it set in New York and the Nickelodeon people said it wasn't wild enough. In trying to work out the pizza story I was in Fabian's office and we were tossing out locations for the pizza story. Someone said, and God help me, I hope it wasn't me, "What about Bosnia?" *(Laughter.)*

Fabian loved it, Bosnia, and I'm like, I can't do that, where are they going to deliver pizza, the purification camps? *(Laughter.)* The story was due the next day and not having the story in Bosnia was a big motivator for me. That's when I came up with the Canadian logging company.

CHARLES: *Now that you're working freelance, any other projects you're working on besides REN & STIMPY?*

DAN: Sure, a Wolverine series for MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS, a WHAT IF? issue, PHANTOM RIDER, and text for the swimsuit issue, not to mention back-ups for next year's annuals. It's a great job where I get to wake up every morning and do comics.

CHARLES: *Any final comments on REN & STIMPY?*

DAN: I want to clear the air. WIZARD magazine, wonderfully researched magazine that it is, listed REN & STIMPY as one of the Top Ten most valuable comics of the year. That's great, except that I'm the writer, **Mike Kazaleh's** the artist, not the other way around as they reported.

Also, and this is important, WIZARD ragged on the fact that even though our air foulers were a great gimmick, they smelled the same. I want to go on the record as saying they're wrong — the two scents are nothing alike!

"The Ren and Stimpy characters were created

BILL WRAY

Self-portrait from the drawing board of Bill Wray. Next page: the silver-screen images of Kricfalusi's creations — Ren and Stimpy.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bill Wray.
Born: 24 March, 1956 — Ford Mead, Maryland.
Interests: Painting, cartooning, comic books, animation.
Favorite color: Blue.

Bill Wray has been involved with the REN & STIMPY show since the first season on Nickelodeon. With the exception of creator John Kricfalusi and writer Bob Camp, few people can relate to the characters of Ren and Stimpy like Bill can. From storyboards to painting, writing and directing, Bill Wray knows Ren and Stimpy. To an ever-growing legion of fans, Ren, a chihuahua with an attitude, and Stimpy, an overfed cat, have acquired cult status. For Bill Wray, working on these characters has fulfilled a lifelong dream to produce the quality of animated cartoons not seen since the early 1960s. Along the way changes have taken place, some good, some not so good. In this close-up look into the animated series, Bill talks about the early days of REN & STIMPY and the work and conflict involved in producing a much-sought-after program.

Through it all there is only one way to describe Bill's enthusiasm for the show: Happy, happy, joy, joy . . .

CHARLES S. NOVINSKIE: *Can you tell us a little bit about the origins of REN & STIMPY?*

BILL WRAY: You mean the original, original story?

CHARLES: *That's the one, the true origin of Ren and Stimpy.*

BILL: I'd say the Ren and Stimpy characters were created some fifteen years ago to be used for personal amusement by **John Kricfalusi.** It was a way for John and his buddies to amuse themselves. These were a bunch of college buddies from Sheridan College, in Canada, where they all went to school. There were three or four people who were really involved in the creation of the characters. Basically they all sat down and created a million or so characters. Those characters were set aside and forgotten about for many years. From time to time we would drag out old stories and rework them. I started sitting in on those discussions a few years after John moved down to California. While I wasn't involved in the actual creation of the characters I did get to sit around with the gang and write stories about the characters. As the years went by the characters all lay dormant as we went on with our lives working for various animation studios. Roughly two years ago, John had his own little studio, Spumco Studios. It was basically John and **Carl Macek** together in this studio. They had heard that Nickelodeon was looking for artistically-driven story ideas to do animated series. They wanted artists to do the series rather than the typical group of Hollywood writers and artists calling the shots. All of the original Warner Bros. cartoons were all written by writer/cartoonists, not writers. Nickelodeon had this idea to make cartoons more creative, more old-fashioned, if you will. John took these old Ren and Stimpy characters, along with a lot of other characters, and put together this presentation called OUR GANG. It was like a kids' show that was to have a live-action host while showing various cartoons. Each cartoon character would make fun of a certain cartoon genre. That was the basic premise, with REN & STIMPY being the take on the dog-and cat-cartoon. As they made this presentation, **Vanessa Coffey,** the producer of the show, said that she really didn't like the overall show idea but that she liked the two characters of Ren and Stimpy. And that was how John ended up with the seed money for a pilot. It took roughly eight months to a year for the pilot to get done. At that point I wasn't involved with REN & STIMPY because I was living in New York. When I would visit John out west I

THE REN & STIMPY SHOW is TM & ©1993 by NICKELODEON.

some 15 years ago for personal amusement."

watched them work on the show. I did a little artwork for John during that time for other shows so that they could make a little extra money to tide everyone over while they were working on the REN & STIMPY pilot.

The pilot went over really well and that was when they were given their first 13 half-hours. After the pilot I received a phone call from John and I went to work for him.

CHARLES: *What was your first assignment on the show?*

BILL: I started out doing the color and all of the backgrounds for the show. I had two people working with me, but I was basically the art director from the word go. I handled all of the color aspect for the backgrounds. Last year, which was the second season, John had me doing some storyboards. I worked with a guy by the name of **Jim Smith**. I eventually went back to running the paint department.

This year I started out in storyboards and will probably just loosely supervise the paint department. I won't be doing a lot of painting because they're finding me more valuable at storyboards and writing.

CHARLES: *You mentioned storyboards and painting. Didn't you also supply some covers for the Marvel Comics version of REN & STIMPY?*

BILL: I did the cover for, I believe, issue #5 and the cover for the PICK OF THE LITTER trade paperback. It's funny you mention that, because I remember going to **Fabian Nicieza**, who is the editor of the book, and telling him that Marvel should do a REN & STIMPY comic because it was going to be hot. I believe Fabian had already heard about REN & STIMPY and it was like we were coming to each other with the idea at the same time. I was originally supposed to do all of the comic-book covers. John asked me not to do the covers because he felt he should be doing the comics. He was my boss at the time so I bowed out, reluctantly. Once John was no longer my boss, I called Fabian and he gave me a few things to do on the book.

CHARLES: *Getting back to the first season, how much time elapsed between the airing of the pilot and the first episode?*

BILL: To tell you the truth, I don't remember. I think it was pretty quickly. I want to say it was a matter of a month or two, but it could have been longer.

CHARLES: *What was the average time to produce a half-hour animation show? Is there a set time?*

BILL: We sort of worked on all of them simultaneously. First, you sit down and write the premise for each show. After that you do the outline. As the outlines are approved people are already starting storyboards. Once a storyboard or two are finished they are handed out to layout and to the color design department. In the meantime everyone is still busy writing and working on storyboards. Roughly a

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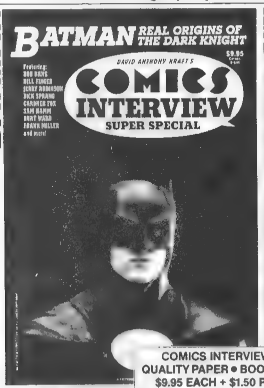

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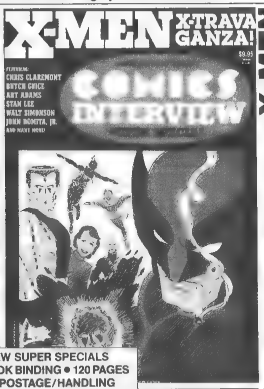

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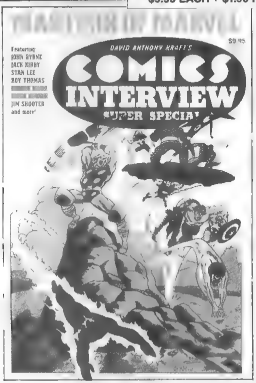

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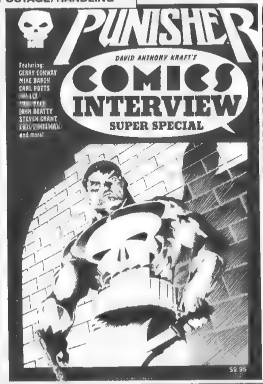

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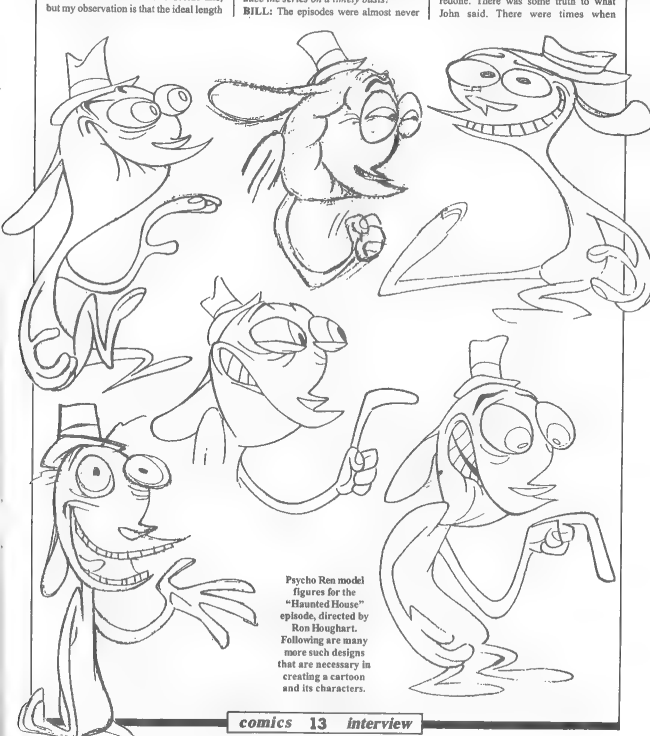
"Episodes were seldom as timely as they should have been."

third of the way into the year the writing is finished. Storyboarding continues for the entire year. Production is also ongoing. The length of time to produce a cartoon varies. There were times that John spent as long as eight months on one cartoon. There were other times that a cartoon was shoved through in, like, two or three months. John would have to decide this, but my observation is that the ideal length of time for John to produce a cartoon would be to do four half-hour cartoons a year. It's easy to see that his ideal length of time to do a cartoon didn't jibe with our production schedule.

CHARLES: *Was that the major thrust of the problems between John Kricfalusi and Nickelodeon, not being able to produce the series on a timely basis?*

BILL: The episodes were almost never turned out as timely as they should have been. Maybe in the very beginning they were. John's point of view was that everything was slowed down because Nickelodeon didn't approve things fast enough and they were always changing their minds on things. That used up a lot of time, because some things had to be redone. There was some truth to what John said. There were times when



Psycho Ren model figures for the "Haunted House" episode, directed by Ron Houghart. Following are many more such designs that are necessary in creating a cartoon and its characters.

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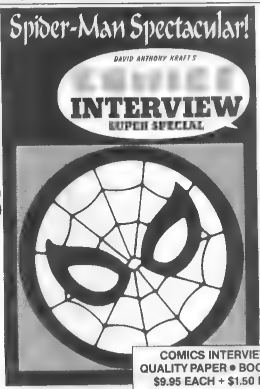

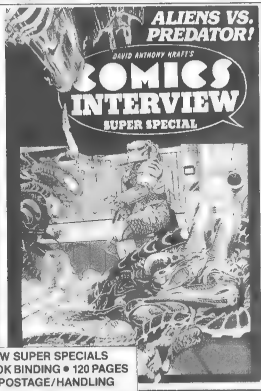

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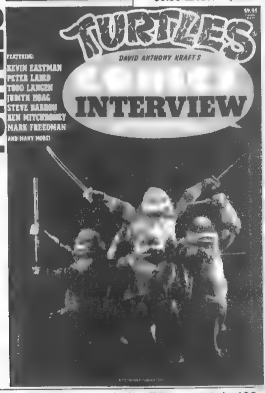

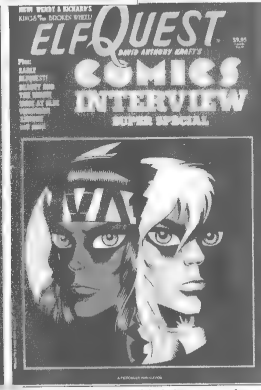

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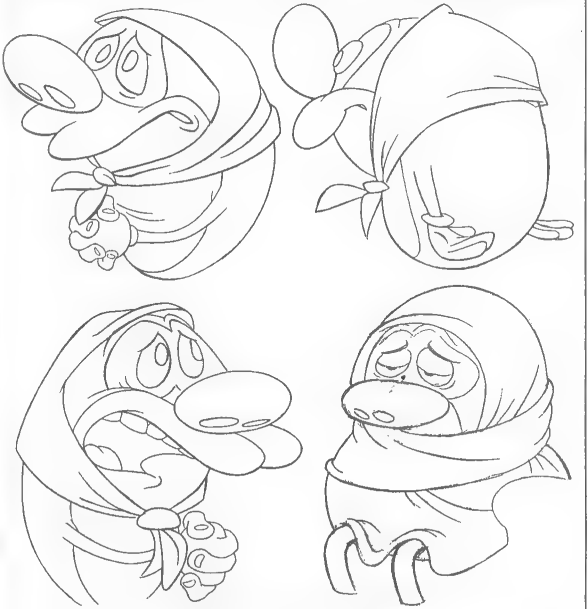
"You can't get the drama of a cartoon on a storyboard."

storyboards had to be redone because you can't get the drama of a cartoon on a storyboard because all of the other elements aren't added in. You have to be John, you have to be the director, to really know what the dramatic music will be like, those sort of things. John could see the impact of this in his mind, whereas someone reading the material cold could totally miss the point. Picture someone back in New York looking at this, looking for problems that might arise for the young children watching; well, they might miss the point. You don't write in the script, "Okay, this is really a dramatic point." I think the cartoons are so well produced that once the final product was put together people were shocked at how intense, how dramatic the material was. It's just so hard to see that when all you have to go by is the storyboards or the script.

Some of the material was shocking in the respect that they couldn't see all of the dramatic effect in the storyboards, but they saw it in the final product. Some of the material was shocking — it was so intense that it was going to stun children. That might be a hallmark of great drama, but when you have to sell cartoons to a children's network and you have a Board of Standards and Practices policing you, well, that's a different story. If they watch the cartoon and feel a lot of dramatic impact, that's not that good. They don't want to feel that kind of impact. Basically, they want everything to be light and happy and fun. They're willing to let things get a little gross. What they don't want is a frightening, dramatic show. Especially when it comes to a father figure verbally abusing characters; that's a real no-no for them. That's why the MAN'S BEST FRIEND episode has never been shown. It's like a human father



"My personal feeling is kids and families can take

abusing his children, which is exactly what it was meant to be. It was an analogy to the mixed messages that parents give to their children.

CHARLES: *That was an episode that was completely finished?*

BILL: All finished and ready to go when Nickelodeon decided they didn't want it. Although all along, the main character George Liquor was a character that Nickelodeon never liked. They always told John they never liked the character, but at the same time they never said we couldn't do it. It's hard to know who to blame I'm sure John feels that Nick is at fault and I'm sure Nick feels that John was at fault. I think part of the whole problem is that the entire process was new to everyone. John's never done his own show and I don't think that Nickelodeon had produced a ton of new animation before that. It's tough when you have a show that's suddenly a big hit. At least a big hit at cable's level. It's like everyone sort of got scared. It was like, we have this hit show and now everyone is watching us. We better make sure that the show is safe. My personal feeling is that kids and families can take a lot more than people think. But what the heck, it's their (Nick's) show so they can decide what they're going to air and what they're not.

CHARLES: *REN & STIMPY was basically a creator-owned series owned by John Kricfalusi. What type of deal did he have with Nickelodeon?*

BILL: John sold all the rights to Nickelodeon when he made the deal with Nickelodeon to air the series.

CHARLES: *Did he have a contract stating that he be retained on the show for as long as it was being produced?*

BILL: I don't know. Only John and Nick would know that. What I've heard on the scuttlebutt level was that in an effort to smooth over the transition of Nickelodeon taking over the show, John was given a sum of money. Also, he was to be hired as an advisor while Nickelodeon actually produced the show. I was also told, and I believe he denies this, that he agreed to the terms. John has never been an advisor on the show and I'm not quite sure if the powers-that-be didn't want him to be or that John didn't want to be. I just don't know the answer to that. John is an all-or-nothing person. It's either his show or it's nothing.

CHARLES: *A lot of the fan press has played upon the fact that there was this creator-owned property that was stolen by a big corporation once it started to make money.*

BILL: They kicked him off the show all right, and they took control of the show all right, but John sold them the rights. Let's face it, that's the only way it could have happened. If they stole the show then there would be this huge court battle going on right now.

I'd like to make a statement that covers my feelings about this entire controversy. That would be, "People who love something want to look at everything in black and white. Here's the good guy, here's the bad guy. The world is not that way; the world is shades of gray. Big business isn't always evil. Big business isn't always good. You have to realize that when the parties involved are close to the situation people will want to say that this person has been wronged or that this is the end of REN & STIMPY. It isn't that simple. Everyone involved has not been perfect in the way things were handled."

I wish we were still working on the shows with John, but we're not, so we have to continue and move ahead.

CHARLES: *Do you know what projects John is working on now?*

BILL: He's working on a lot of stuff that he's had put together for years. There's a feature called THE RIPPING FRIENDS which has a group of manly men going around helping kids in trouble. They all sort of look like **Burt Lancaster** and **Kirk Douglas.** Fun, silly things like if you're having trouble with your coach in school you call these guys and they put duct tape across the coach's hairy back and rip it off! They like to rip things. Nickelodeon did let John have the rights back to his George Liquor character be-

more than people think. But it's Nick's show."

cause they never liked the character in the first place. Two objections Nickelodeon had with the character were that the last name is spelled the same as "liquor," as in alcohol, that and the fact that the name sounded like "lick her." He also has a TV special he's trying to sell called IT'S A GODDAMN CHRISTMAS. It's a hilarious title but he'd have to sell it to someone like HBO.

CHARLES: *We're now into the third season of REN & STIMPY and the schedule calls for 13 half-hour shows. Is that correct?*

BILL: That's correct.

CHARLES: *What is your involvement going into the third season?*

BILL: I'm doing storyboards and was also involved in the writing for a few weeks.

CHARLES: *Excluding the normal evolution of the characters from one season to the next, are there any major changes in the characters now that Nickelodeon is producing the show?*

BILL: There will certainly be less of John's personal take on everything. And that is a very big part of the show. The biggest blow of all will be not having his voice. We feel that we've written some great shows.

As far as the care and time that was put into the original shows, that will be impossible to attain. We can't spend eight months per cartoon. The reason the studio was set up was so that we can get these cartoons out in a timely fashion. We'll probably be a little late at times. We just won't have the time to give the physical care to the cartoons that John did. Under the restrictions of time we're going to try to produce cartoons as good as we can.

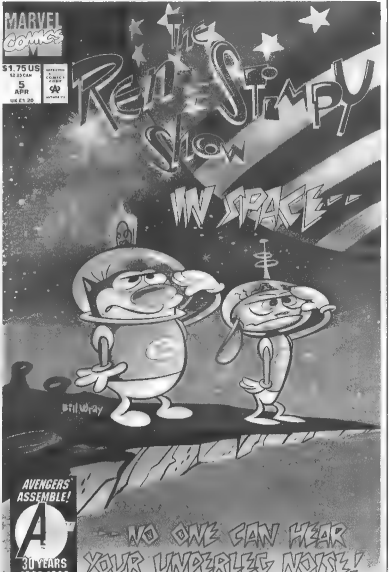
To give a more direct answer to your question concerning John's feel for the cartoon, there's a show we're finishing up now, VISIT TO ANTHONY. That show, in my personal opinion, is John's primal scream against his father. We have a very strong father figure railing against Ren and Stimpy in a misguided manner in an attempt to protect his son, who likes the characters. The story is actually based on a real boy who wrote the very first REN & STIMPY fan letter. The story is about how Ren and Stimpy go to visit Anthony. In fact, we brought Anthony to the studio and he is actually the voice of the character in the cartoon. **Randy Quaid** plays the dad. This is one of the stories that was yanked from John. Basically, it's like us trying to interpret John's personal angst with his father, including actual dialogue that his father used to use. There's even a joke in there that his father used to tell.

"A weekly show is insatiable. It's impossible to make

Since the sound track was never recorded when John was still there we're not sure how he would have wanted it to sound. At the time it was being produced, and up to this date, the animosity is so strong that we can't work with him. We had to do the best we could without him. Because of that it won't be his personal vision so the story will be weakened. The next season we're not going to try to produce shows that reflect John's vision. We can't — because we're not John.

CHARLES: *Basically, the third season will sort of wrap up John's ideas for the show?*

BILL: Pretty much. We're not going to sit around saying, "What would John have done?" We're sitting around saying, "What can we do to make funny REN & STIMPY cartoons?" Keep in mind the main guy running the show, **Bob Camp**, was the main writer on the REN & STIMPY show from the beginning. It's still going to have the flavor of REN & STIMPY. Maybe not as much of the personal pain and drama that we've seen in the past. Some of the episodes are truly frightening and some of my favorites. Unfortunately, those are the ones that Nick is the most uncomfortable with. Nick wants a lighter, gut-funny type of show.



CHARLES: *At what point did the animosity arise between John and Nickelodeon? It appears that John received a fair value for the rights if he accepted the deal — what went wrong?*

BILL: A lot went wrong. It's hard to know where to begin. My personal opinion is that the bottom line was that a major corporation wanted product and wasn't getting it. That's it in a nutshell. You can look at all of the finger pointing and such, they did this, you did that, it all came down to the fact that they weren't getting shows on time. I don't even think they would have minded if the shows were over budget. They wouldn't have been happy, but they would have gotten over it. I don't even think they would have minded if one or two shows got out of hand and they couldn't show them; just as long as there was a ton of product following it. There just wasn't enough product getting done. They had to have product to get on the air and they just weren't getting it. John always felt that quality of product was far more important than making deadlines. He's done this wherever he's been. He's always tried to do great cartoons. He's even put his own money into things to get it done. You have to admire him for his stand that the cartoon has to be great and nothing else matters. He may feel that that's part of it, but that everything Nickelodeon did slowed him down. That's always been his view.

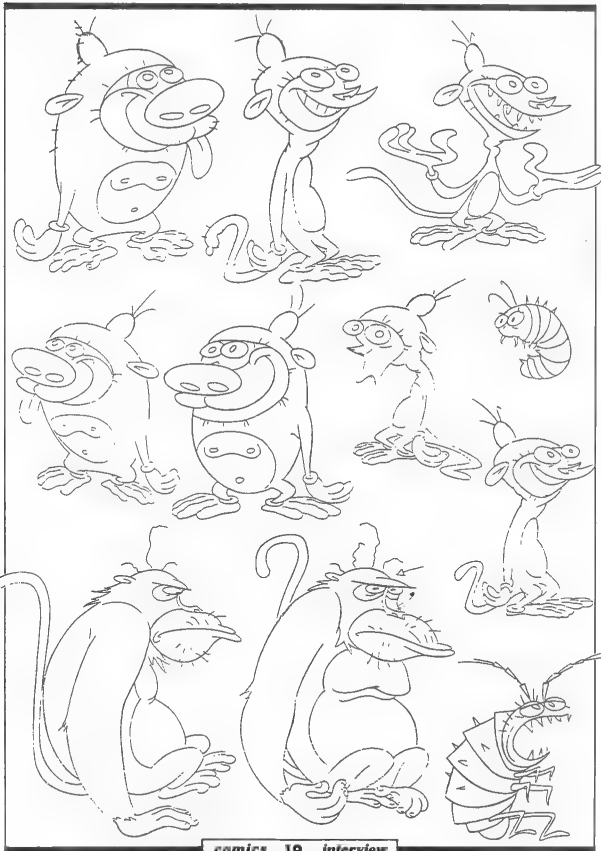
CHARLES: *So basically there was a trade-off between getting product out on time and wanting to have all of the time in the world to make it the best product possible.*

BILL: Basically, at the last minute we spent time rushing cartoons out to try and meet the criteria of getting cartoons out on time. Unfortunately, the plan wasn't implemented soon enough. That needed to be done right from the start. It should have been, okay, here's four cartoons that we're going to blow out in record time in order to have more time to concentrate on these particular episodes. It just never happened. A weekly TV show is an insatiable feeding machine. It's impossible to make great product and do it on time. You try to do pretty good product and then a couple that are great. You just have to accept that. All the cartoons John made were great. Unfortunately, all of the deadlines were missed.

CHARLES: *Were you surprised by the success of REN & STIMPY?*

BILL: No, not at all. I knew fifteen years ago that if someone let us make cartoons that they'd be a huge phenomenon. It's not that John or anyone else on the show is so

a great product and do it on time. Accept that."



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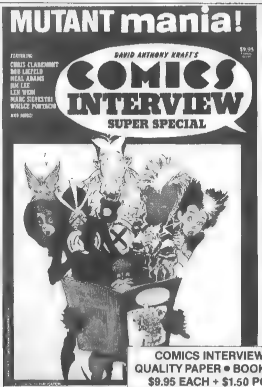

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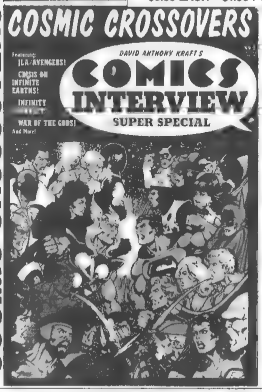

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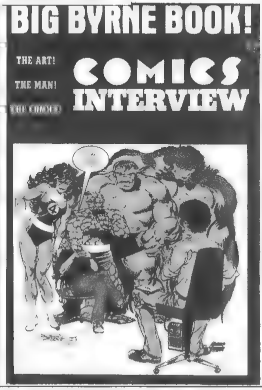

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"We're doing cartoons fo[illegible]f having fun."

great. It's just that the state of animation has been just so bad on TV for so long; that's why THE SIMPSONS are such a great success. It's like, adult content in cartoons, what a concept. THE SIMPSONS is sort of an animated sitcom. It could be a live-action show.

CHARLES: *Didn't Ren and Stimpy make it onto THE SIMPSONS?*

BILL: Both in a verbal reference as well as in an actual animated sequence. One of the guys from the REN & STIMPY crew actually did the layouts, although the SIMPSONS crew did the voices. That was really weird. I would have preferred to see Ren and Stimpy drawn in the SIMPSONS style. **Matt Groening** is a big fan of the show so they're always thumbing their noses at us a little bit. It's good clean fun. We actually had an episode, STIMPY'S CARTOON, where he directs a cartoon himself. We had a Simpson-like character in the cartoon. I don't know if that made the final cut. It may have ended up on the cutting-room floor.

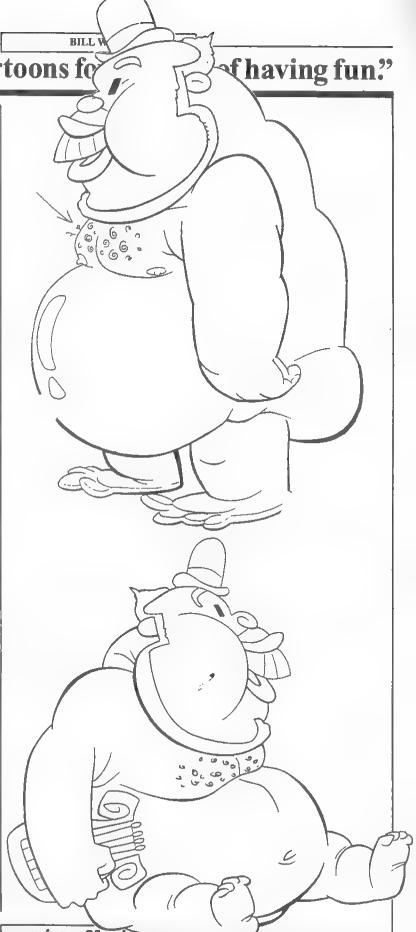
CHARLES: *What do you consider great animation?*

BILL: John and I would sit around and discuss how really good cartoons died in 1961. Hanna-Barbera did some funny stuff back then. After that a lot of the material was crap. That was about the time when parental groups decided that, darn it, children's cartoons have to be educational.

Quite frankly, Nick would be happy if our show placed in the top ten of all the educational shows for children. It really bothers them that we're not. We maintain that that's not the point. We don't want to satisfy parental groups that are solely interested in educating children, because then you're no longer doing great entertainment, you're doing education. Kids have a million things today that regulate their lives. What we're doing is animation and cartoons for the sake of having fun. What's wrong with that? What's wrong is trying to pretend that having fun is educational, like the networks do with THE JETSONS. THE JETSONS isn't educational, but the networks say it is in order to fill a quota. And if you were to try and make THE JETSONS educational, then it would be boring.

CHARLES: *We also see parental groups complaining that cartoons do nothing more than promote products to make toy companies rich. Shows like TRANSFORMERS or G I. JOE.*

BILL: That's the unique and radical thing about Ren and Stimpy. They're



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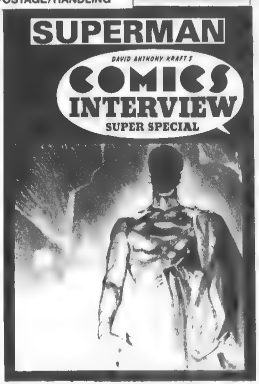

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"We'll be using characters from earlier episodes."

brand-new characters. No merchandising to go with it. No toy company was preplanning the show based on the toy line. The toys and merchandising will come afterwards.

CHARLES: *Are there big plans for merchandising?*

BILL: I think Nickelodeon has always tried to not overdo it. The name of the game is making money although I think Nick has always tried to be bip by not overdoing it. They don't want to seem over-exploitive.

CHARLES: *There seems to be a real revival for animation on TV with Fox leading the way. We already mentioned THE SIMPSONS. We also have the animated BATMAN and X-MEN shows. How do you feel about those shows?*

BILL: I've seen a few of the Batman episodes. Some of the shows, to me anyway, look better than others. Knowing what I know, I can say, "Here's an episode where they really spent money and a lot of time producing it. Here's one they rushed through." Unfortunately, they're still working under the idea of a children's program. In the comic-book form Batman is killing people; on television they can't kill anybody. Look at Wolverine. In the comic he's a killing machine. He's not on the animated series.

CHARLES: *I think they got around that by having the X-Men fight Sentinels.*

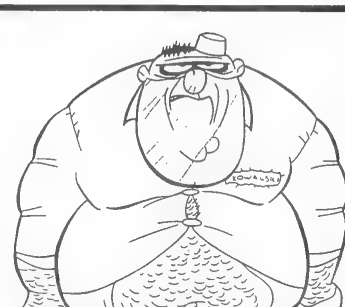
BILL: Well, that's true, you can kill and blow up robots all you want. That tends to get a little thin after awhile.

CHARLES: *Getting back to REN & STIMPY, will we see any new characters this season?*

BILL: There will be some new characters. We'll also be using a lot of characters that made appearances from earlier episodes. By the time this sees print there will be two new characters, Victor and his dad. Basically, these guys are the town bullies. Victor is a professional bully. He even carries a professional bullies card. They'll be in at least two cartoons.

There will be a cow character that will be appearing called Mr. Cow — although he does have an udder.

There's a half-hour special that will have been out by the time this sees print, THE CANADIAN KILTED YAKSMAN. Ren and Stimpy play Mounties and it's one of the best shows ever done. It's really great looking and it's animated by Carbunkle Cartoons, the studio that animated all of the best REN & STIMPY cartoons. The studio is owned by **Bob Jaques** and **Kelly Armstrong,** who are the real unsung heroes of why the anima-



"Tons of people can draw realistically. Guys who do

tion looks so great. Whenever I ask someone to name their top five REN & STIMPY shows it's always the ones animated by Carbunkle. They did SPACE MADNESS, SVEN HOEK, and POWDERED TOAST MAN.

CHARLES: *Which is your favorite character?*

BILL: To write, I prefer Ren. To draw, I prefer Stimpy because he's easier to draw. There's not a lot to do with Stimpy because he doesn't have a huge range of emotion; Ren is fun because you can make him mean. It drives me crazy when I tell people I work on the show and they always say, "Make Ren meaner." *(Laughter.)*

CHARLES: *How many episodes of the show are scheduled?*

BILL: As far as I know they want to do at least 65 shows, because they want to syndicate it. That means another two or possibly three years for the show.

CHARLES: *Is 65 episodes a magical number for syndication?*

BILL: Yes, 65 is the minimum number of shows you can have to syndicate with.

CHARLES: *Is REN & STIMPY material that will be looked upon as classic cartoons ten years from now?*

BILL: I hope so. I think the cartoons will stand the test of time. What we try to do is not be contemporary with the jokes.

CHARLES: *So we won't be seeing any Waco, Texas, jokes or anything like that?*

BILL: Very, very rarely will we make reference to current events. It's like when you watch an old Warner Bros. cartoon and you see a ration card joke, and you say, "What, what the hell does that mean?"

CHARLES: *I take it that animation has always fascinated you?*

BILL: I've always loved animation. Growing up, I loved the Hanna-Barbera cartoons and the Warner Bros. cartoons. When I was 15 years old I lucked out by meeting a Disney animator who was in Newport Beach, California. He was working for an eccentric guy who wanted to do his own animated feature. The guy had some extra money so he hired this Disney animator to train us. I worked at all of the different studios — Disney, Hanna-Barbera, Filmation. After working in the business for many years I met John and we started talking about not just making cartoons, but making great cartoons. I never thought anyone would let us make great cartoons like REN & STIMPY. It was really frustrating, so I thought I'd try my hand at comic books. That and try my hand at painting.

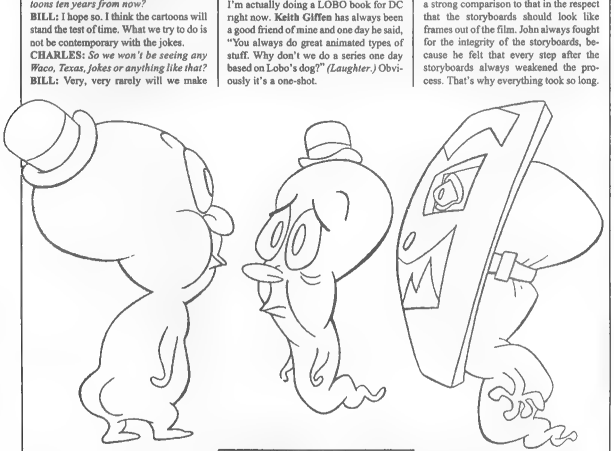
Eight years ago, I moved to New York and did some work for DC and Marvel. I'm actually doing a LOBO book for DC right now. **Keith Giffen** has always been a good friend of mine and one day he said, "You always do great animated types of stuff. Why don't we do a series one day based on Lobo's dog?" *(Laughter.)* Obviously it's a one-shot.

CHARLES: *Are we going to see Ren and Stimpy in the LOBO book?*

BILL: Funny you should ask that. *(Laughter.)* There might be a cameo in there. Of course, it won't really be Ren and Stimpy, it'll just look like them. *(Laughter.)*

CHARLES: *Other than time constraints, is there a major difference between doing storyboards for a half-hour television show and that of a feature-length animation project?*

BILL: I'd have to say no, other than the factor of time constraint that you already mentioned. I've never worked on storyboards for a feature film, but I've seen enough and talked to enough people to know that there's not much difference. There is a difference when you're working on storyboards for a live-action film. In that case the storyboards are done to set up the shots. It's done to save time when filming; you set up your camera angles and such with the storyboards. Great producers like **Alfred Hitchcock** used storyboards to the nth degree. He said that once the storyboards were done the picture was finished; all of the rest was just an afterthought. I would say that we draw a strong comparison to that in the respect that the storyboards should look like frames out of the film. John always fought for the integrity of the storyboards, because he felt that every step after the storyboards always weakened the process. That's why everything took so long.



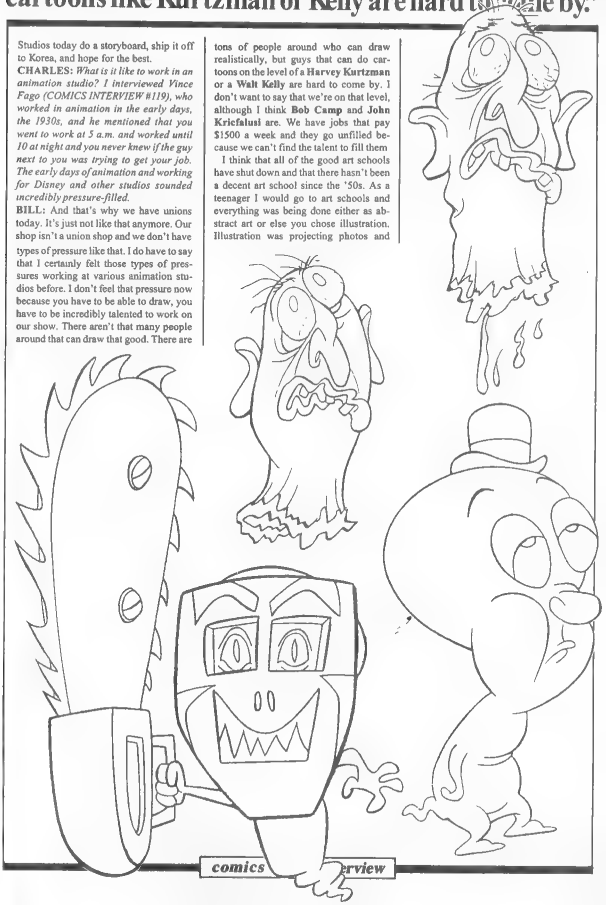
cartoons like Kurtzman or Kelly are hard to come by."

Studios today do a storyboard, ship it off to Korea, and hope for the best.

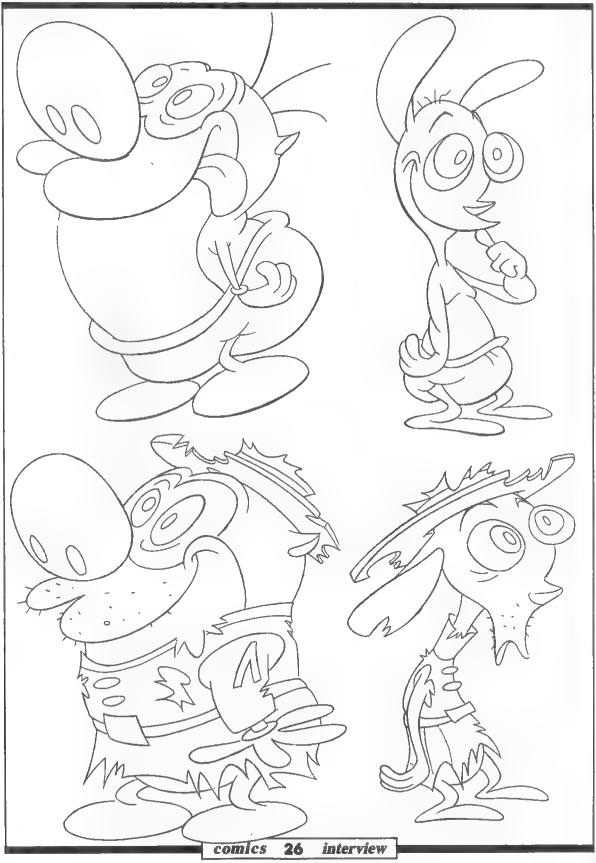
CHARLES: *What is it like to work in an animation studio? I interviewed Vince Fago (COMICS INTERVIEW #119), who worked in animation in the early days, the 1930s, and he mentioned that you went to work at 5 a.m. and worked until 10 at night and you never knew if the guy next to you was trying to get your job. The early days of animation and working for Disney and other studios sounded incredibly pressure-filled.*

BILL: And that's why we have unions today. It's just not like that anymore. Our shop isn't a union shop and we don't have types of pressure like that. I do have to say that I certainly felt those types of pressures working at various animation studios before. I don't feel that pressure now because you have to be able to draw, you have to be incredibly talented to work on our show. There aren't that many people around that can draw that good. There are tons of people around who can draw realistically, but guys that can do cartoons on the level of a **Harvey Kurtzman** or a **Walt Kelly** are hard to come by. I don't want to say that we're on that level, although I think **Bob Camp** and **John Kricfalusi** are. We have jobs that pay $1500 a week and they go unfilled because we can't find the talent to fill them

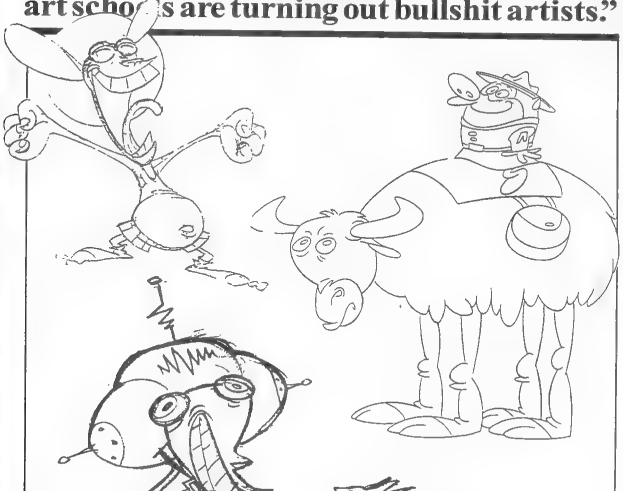
I think that all of the good art schools have shut down and that there hasn't been a decent art school since the '50s. As a teenager I would go to art schools and everything was being done either as abstract art or else you chose illustration. Illustration was projecting photos and



"Learning to draw is a discipline. Today's



art schools are turning out bullshit artists."



drawing them. There was no one teaching how to construct a figure in an old-fashioned way. I had to search high and low and found that education to some degree in the Arts Students League in New York City. Learning how to draw is a discipline just like the other sciences. If you want to learn how to draw you have to be disciplined. Today's art schools are turning out bullshit artists. They're too busy telling them to be themselves and to have a good time rather than teaching them structure and discipline. Most of the people who do well in art school are people that have a natural affinity for drawing and they just copy and learn from someone's style. If I ever make enough money in animation, I'd like to start a scholarship fund for a good art school program.

CHARLES: *Is there an internship program at the studio?*

BILL: Not really an internship program, but we have classes at the studio. John started that, way back when. What we do is give people four weeks of classes in which they get paid. If they show enough promise we hire them on.

CHARLES: *What do you hope to be doing ten years from now? What are your aspirations?*

BILL: At one time I gave up my aspirations which were to direct funny cartoons. It looks like it will happen this year on REN & STIMPY. That's what I've been promised. After REN & STIMPY other opportunities will come along. There's a huge audience for adult-oriented animation. I don't mean adult like sex, but adult in the sense that adults can enjoy and appreciate the work. I would really love to do a feature-length, animated horror film.

"It may be of interest that the stories I illustrated were

Accomplished on a number of artistic levels, Mr. Swayze plays the piano.

Captain Marvel & Mary Marvel ™1992 DC Comics, Inc

generally mine all the way, layout, pencilling and inking."

MARC SWAYZE

Marcus D. Swayze stands as one of the most amazing, if little-known, comics creators of the 1940s. Not only was he an artist who could draw in both the cartoony style associated with Fawcett's original CAPTAIN MARVEL, but also in other, more realistic styles, as well as having been a writer (in those days when writers and artists were usually separate entities in comic books), plus a musician and an athlete.

In 1956, Marc left the comics field to establish and become director for an art department with the Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation Packaging Division in Monroe, Louisiana, where he remained until 1980. He received his master's degree in art from Northeast Louisiana University in 1973, and later served as an adjunct professor of art at NLU.

As a musician, Marc plays guitar, piano and several other instruments. Most recently he has been playing in a Dixieland band made up chiefly of NLU professors.

Among comics collectors, Swayze is mainly known as one of the early artists of Fawcett's CAPTAIN MARVEL, having drawn a number of stories, written others, illustrated several covers, and drawn the original Mary Marvel character and the first MM tales. He is also remembered as artist on the FLYIN' JENNY newspaper strip for Bell Syndicate.

Of Swayze's work and person, two of his now-deceased former Fawcett colleagues had the following to say. First, the late C.C. Beck: "Swayze is a remarkable person, a fine Southern gentleman, a great, great artist, and a beautiful guitarist, pianist and violinist. In addition, he has a beautiful wife and family, a fine old Southern home, and a marvelous sense of humor." And from the late Rod Reed, Fawcett editor and later writer: "Although Jack Binder is acclaimed for his work on MARY MARVEL, Marc Swayze did the first portraits. I have before me the number one issue of her very own magazine and her garb is amazingly mod with short skirts and boots almost to the knees. Swayze, of course, wanted to do the whole Mary series himself, and it was my distasteful job to convince him that he couldn't be spared from the Captain Marvel team . . ."

JOHN PIERCE: *Okay, so how did you get the job with Keaton?*

MARC SWAYZE: A relative of **Keaton's** who was a member of the art faculty at Louisiana Tech advised of his need for help. **Russell Keaton** was a truly great professional and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with him, and particularly at that time in my career. From him I got the conviction that a good comic-strip man could "do it all" . . . layout, pencil, ink, letter, even write. I never heard of the assembly-line system until I got to New York, to work for Fawcett.

JOHN: *Tell us, then, how you got to New York — to work for Fawcett, I mean.*

MARC: I returned to Louisana after leaving **Keaton** and contacted several publishers and newspaper syndicates. I was called to New York by **France E. (Eddie) Herron,** Fawcett's comics editor. This must have been early '41.

JOHN: *Let's concentrate on your Fawcett period for a while. You were there from . . .*

MARC: Must have been from about March of '41 until late '42, until I went into the service, which was '42-'44. But even there, I continued to write Captain Marvel stories as a freelancer. Upon returning to civilian life, I was with Fawcett on regular assignment basis, working in Louisiana, until they got completely out of comics, about 1954.

JOHN: *And you worked mainly on CAPTAIN MARVEL at first?*

MARC: I was hired specifically to work on CAPTAIN MARVEL. Except for the time it took to do the original drawings for the Mary Marvel character and drawing the first one or two stories for that feature, plus an occasional illustration for the non-comics magazines, CAPTAIN MARVEL was all I did until I left for the armed forces in 1942.

JOHN: *And what about the volume of work you did for Cap?*

VITAL STATISTICS

CHRONOLOGY OF MARC SWAYZE'S CAREER

1939-40: Assistant to Russell Keaton on FLYIN' JENNY newspaper strip for Bell Syndicate.

1941-41: Fawcett Publications staff artist assigned to CAPTAIN MARVEL. Drew several covers — at least one each on WHIZ COMICS, WOW COMICS and CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES. Did story art on at least 19 issues, mostly WHIZ and CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES.

1942-44: Armed Forces, but continued to write CAPTAIN MARVEL stories as a freelancer

1944-45: After army discharge returned to New York City; freelanced for Fawcett doing various features, among them "Ibis" and "Mr. Scarlet," signed a contract with Bell Syndicate in 1944 to do art on FLYIN' JENNY Sunday page.

1945-54: Back in Monroe, LA, with Fawcett assignment to produce all the art and some writing on "Phantom Eagle" feature; continued FLYIN' JENNY Sunday page and added daily strip upon death of Keaton in 1945, later worked on Fawcett romance comics "Phantom Eagle" (WOW COMICS) #32 through #68 — story art — 36. "Romances" 10 different magazine titles, from 1948 — story art — 69. (Total Fawcett production estimate for entire career — over 121 stories, excluding the writing.)

1954-55: Worked on various features, first as a staffer and later freelance, for Charlton Publications.

1956-80: Gave up comics to accept position as art department for the Packaging Division (now Olin-kraft, Inc.) of Olin Corporation.

MARC: I doubt if anyone produced more CM art than I did while I was there. And as I look back over the books that were published at the time, I am convinced that I contributed more CM scripts than any other artist, and more than some of the writers, plus several covers. It may be of interest that the stories I illustrated were generally mine all the way, layout, pencilling, and

"Fawcett stories always followed the format of description

inking. They apparently respected my wishes to stay out of assembly-line work.

JOHN: *Were stories submitted to you with each panel blocked out, with ample descriptions of what should be shown, or were you just given a general idea and told to take it from there?*

MARC: Fawcett stories all followed the formal format of description plus dialogue for every panel. I believe it was strict policy that stories be submitted first in outline for approval, the completed script to follow. That was my procedure for writing them. The writers varied in style and detail in the matter of descriptions. Naturally, some stories afforded more graphic challenge than others. Remember, though, a story had passed an editor before it reached the artist, and there were some highly qualified, dedicated people on the comics editorial staff at Fawcett. Of course, the stories that I most enjoyed drawing were those little "masterpieces" which I wrote myself.

JOHN: *When Fawcett hired you, were you shown a sample of artwork and told, "This is what we want?"*

MARC: Well, yes, **Eddie Herron**, comics editor, had sent me some drawings of Captain Marvel to duplicate as samples of my work. Then, when I joined the staff, **Herron**, or perhaps C.C. **Beck** or art director **Al Allard**, said they had been unable to tell mine from **Beck's**. When I did the one-shots on features such as "Ibis" or "Mr. Scarlet" in 1944 I simply used the preceding issue as a style guide. As far as style goes, however, I used the style that fitted the need.

JOHN: *When drawing from another writer's script, did you have any special approach to laying out a page?*

MARC: I don't think so. My objective was to try to tell a pictorial story, as independent of the dialogue and captions as possible. This was a rather remote possibility with the romances I later did, but was a pretty good approach. I thought, with the action-adventure material. One writer, according to **Wendell Crowley,** when he knew his script was going to me, simply wrote "continue action" for most panels, knowing I was going to do it my own way anyhow.

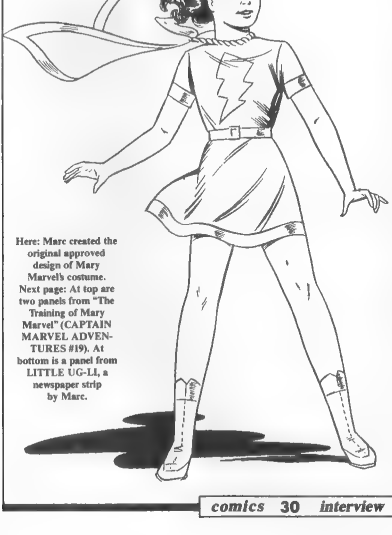
JOHN: *And what about when the script was yours? Did you have to have the complete script approved before you could start drawing it?*

MARC: I submitted finished scripts for editorial approval always. I believe the checks for scripts and art came down different pipelines, which may have had something to do with it. In doing CM scripts in the service, I kept in mind the fact that a percentage of his stories were to be of the light, humorous type. I tried to fill that need, usually. **Wendell Crowley,** who had come over to Fawcett from Binder's, was my editor. Later he told me that during that time I had only one story rejected, and that was one in which I featured Steamboat, not knowing that the character was being phased out.

JOHN: *You are, in essence, the artistic creator of Mary Marvel, as some would use that term. Your original design for her shows some differences in the outfit from the actual first appearances in CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES #18 and #19. For example, she has a belt rather than the standard sash, and her boots look a little different. Do you recall who made the changes? Which I assume were done to bring her outfit more in line with Captain Marvel's. There were, of course, later changes such as the fuller skirt, etc., but those were done by other artists.*

MARC: You are a keen observer. The reproduction you have is from the original sketch, which I still have. I imagine the belt buckle, done hastily at the time, presented a decision which had to be resolved . . . either developed so that it was functional, or do away with it. It escapes me now. Same with the boots. Whatever, I'm to blame

JOHN: *Okay, so you went into the armed forces in 1942, but continued to write for Fawcett as a freelancer. During that period of time — before you went into the service, that is — how often did you go to the Fawcett offices to take in or*



Here: Marc created the original approved design of Mary Marvel's costume. Next page: At top are two panels from "The Training of Mary Marvel" (CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES #19). At bottom is a panel from LITTLE UG-LI, a newspaper strip by Marc.

plus dialogue for each panel. I believe it was strict policy."

I GUESS I DIDN'T DO IT LIKE CAPTAIN MARVEL AFTER ALL ! I SLIPPED UP SOMEWHERE ! BUT I WON'T GO TO JAIL ---
BOOM
EXERTING HER GREAT STRENGTH, MARY MARVEL BREAKS THE HANDCUFFS !
I'VE BEEN INVITED INTO WOW COMICS !! I'LL ACCEPT THE INVITATION. GOODBYE CAPTAIN MARVEL ! THANKS FOR EVERYTHING !!
SO LONG, SIS ! I KNOW YOU'LL DO A BANG-UP JOB IN WOW COMICS !
DON'T MISS MARY MARVEL IN WOW COMICS AT YOUR NEWSSTAND NOW !

pick up assignments?

MARC: Before I went into the service I was a 9-to-5 employee on the art staff. As I was not freelancing I did not pick up and deliver assignments, but received them from the editorial office down the hall. This was during the period when all offices were in the Paramount Building. All of the writing, to my knowledge, was freelanced from outside, the only exception being the few CM stories that I wrote. Later, when I returned to New York in '44, I did freelance for a couple of months while working out arrangements to come back south, and I went into the offices once or twice a week. I wasn't particular about what the editors gave me, and I doubt if they were. I remember doing a "Mr. Scarlet" and a "Prince Ibis" and a one-pager featuring Mary Marvel promoting the paper conservation program of the time. Funny — I drew Mary just as I had in the beginning and I'll bet she didn't look anything like she did in the stories of that period.

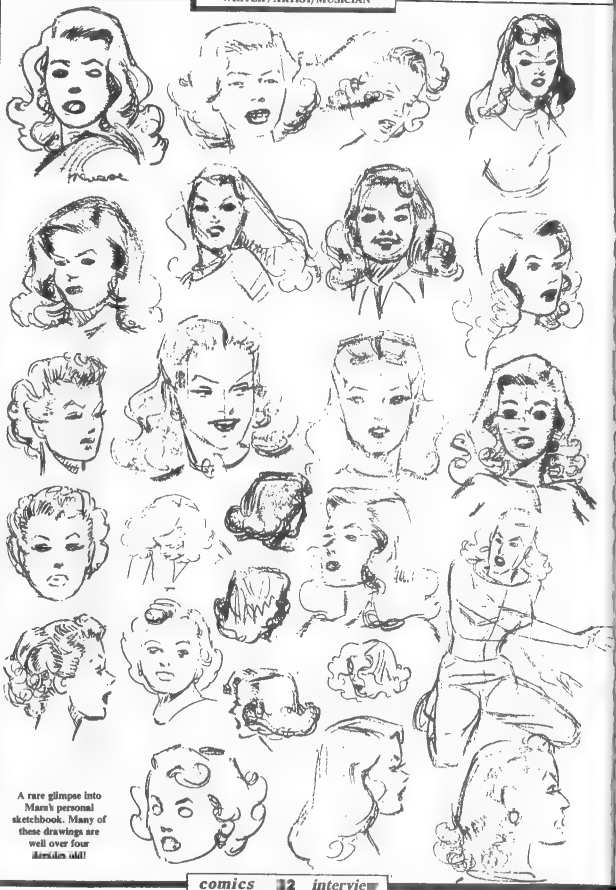
JOHN: *I'm kind of curious about your service days, at least as they relate to your Fawcett work. Do you know who drew the Captain Marvel stories which you wrote while you were in the armed forces?*

MARC: No. But I'm sure they were drawn in **Beck's** studio, which was supplying all the CM art at the time. Incidentally, **Beck's** shop was created while I was in the service. When I left Fawcett, **Beck** and I both worked at the editorial and executive offices located in the Paramount Building at Times Square. Despite some of the published stories to the contrary, I never worked for **Beck.** He was my friend, but never my superior.

JOHN: *Did any of your fellow GIs ever catch on to what you were doing in your spare time and make any comments to you about it?*

MARC: It wasn't a secret. And I don't recall anything ever being made out of it. As a matter of fact, now that I think about it, I wonder if the readers, or anybody, ever gave a thought to comics being written. Or drawn!

JOHN: *Well, I wasn't born until 1947, but I recall that when I was reading comics as a child in the 1950s, I had this vague idea that someone had to be writing them, but had no notion at all that artists existed. I thought the whole thing was done mechanically somehow! Well, anyway,*



A rare glimpse into Mark's personal sketchbook. Many of these drawings are well over four decades old!

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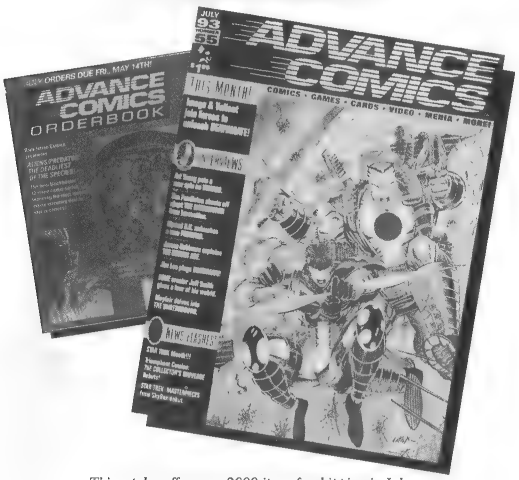

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"I thought I was good at snatching questionable pitches."

did you ever see any servicemen reading comics, especially CAPTAIN MARVEL or any other Fawcetts?

MARC: Not often, if at all. I spent several months in an army hospital and a little of that time in the recreation rooms maintained by the Red Cross. There were usually a few servicemen lounging around reading. May have been comics. I believe there were statistics to the effect that comics were the major form of literature read by the military.

JOHN: *That's what I'd always heard, which is why I was wondering. Well, here's a question which may be just a bit out of order, but also deals with an area that has kind of fascinated me. Now, I'm no sports fan, but I've always been intrigued by the stories, such as those related by various Fawcett folks and recorded in such places as Steranko's HISTORY OF COMICS, about the ballgames between the various studios. I gather that this was a regular thing, at least during the summer. Can you tell us more about these contests — who organized them, umpired them, etc.? And what did you guys do for recreation in the winters?*

MARC: Those ball games! There were not that many, but the intense rivalry and tremendously funny events that occurred during the games and the beer parties that always followed, could never have been forgotten by anyone. I will try to be brief.

Remember now, the Fawcett offices were all located on the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th floors of the Paramount Building at that time. Whereas the art department numbered about 30, only about half a dozen were in comics, the majority being layout artists, working on the numerous non-comics magazines of Fawcett's. So in talking about the Fawcett gang, whether bowling in the winter or playing ball in the summer, we're including members of the comics editorial staff, freelance comics writers, non-comics layout artists, mainly people who enjoyed doing those things and were pretty good at them.

On the other hand, the **Binder** group, always our baseball opponents, were 100% comics people — Jack and Otto, **Wendell Crowley, Ken Bald, Charley Thomsey, Pete Riss,** and I wish I had time to recall them all.

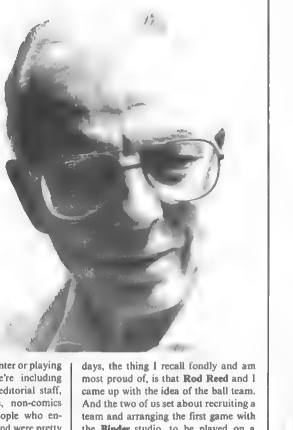
Whatever I might have done in those days, the thing I recall fondly and am most proud of, is that **Rod Reed** and I came up with the idea of the ball team. And the two of us set about recruiting a team and arranging the first game with the **Binder** studio, to be played on a Saturday in Englewood — or was it Edgewater, New Jersey? — where the **Binder** studio was located.

Our team had **Vic Cappalupo,** layout artist, at shortstop, **Stanley Kauffman,** writer, at second base, **Tom Naughton,** comics editor, at third and — who was at first . . . **Eddie Rickbak?** Help me remember, someone! Anyway, it was a terrific infield!

In the outfield we had **Al Jetter,** letterer, and **Mac Raboy** sometimes, and I need help recalling the outfield, too . . . maybe **Angelo Grasso,** letterer, or **Chic Stone,** artist? I don't recall **Beck** or **Costanza** on the ballfield, but they were at the parties that followed, so maybe they were in the outfield.

Rod pitched and I caught — and wives had to be called on to umpire. Not having any protective equipment for them, we suggested they call the balls and strikes from a position back of the pitcher. Now, I thought I was pretty good at snatching questionable pitches over into the strike zone, but my little trick got nowhere with the wife in that first game. I

A candid photograph of Mr. Swayze



Two more examples of Marc's strip artwork. Note his use of varying styles.

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"I am proud of the volume of romantic comics I produced."

made a few trips out to the mound to plead with her about it and she broke up with laughter when I explained in detail where the strike zone was, and so on. Rod was laughing harder than the ump was! When he came in for our turn at bat, I told him, "That woman out there is going to lose this game for us, so what are you laughing at?!!" As you must have guessed, the umpire was Rod's wife, **Edith "Kentuck" Reed,** a devout Dodger fan who never attended a game without her scoring book wherein she recorded every play in detail. She knew the game as well as we did.

Rod and **Kentuck Reed** became my close, lifelong friends, exchanging visits with us a number of times over the years. **Jess Benton** may have been on our ball team and **Al Liederman** and **Fernando Martinez.**

JOHN: *Thanks for taking the time to answer that oddball question of mine — no pun intended! As I said, I'm not a sports fan, but I've long been fascinated by the stories of what comics pros, especially the Fawcett folks, did in their off hours. I think too many of today's pros eat, sleep and breathe comics, and never get away from a comics-oriented environment. But, now I'm starting to editorialize and not interview, so let's get back to interviewing. Okay, it's now 1944, and you're discharged from the army. Take us on from there.*

MARC: I returned to New York and freelanced for Fawcett doing various features for a few months, when we reached an agreement enabling me to return to my home in Louisiana and produce the art for the "Phantom Eagle" in WOW COMICS. And during this time I also signed a contract with Bell to do the art on the FLYIN' JENNY Sunday page.

JOHN: *And when did the romance comics come in?*

MARC: The romances were offered to me after "Phantom Eagle" and WOW COMICS folded. From the art standpoint they provided several challenges such as more emphasis on character development and emotional expression, more realistic art style and more female characters. I enjoyed doing the romances. I drew them easily and fast, and the editors kept me comfortably supplied with scripts.

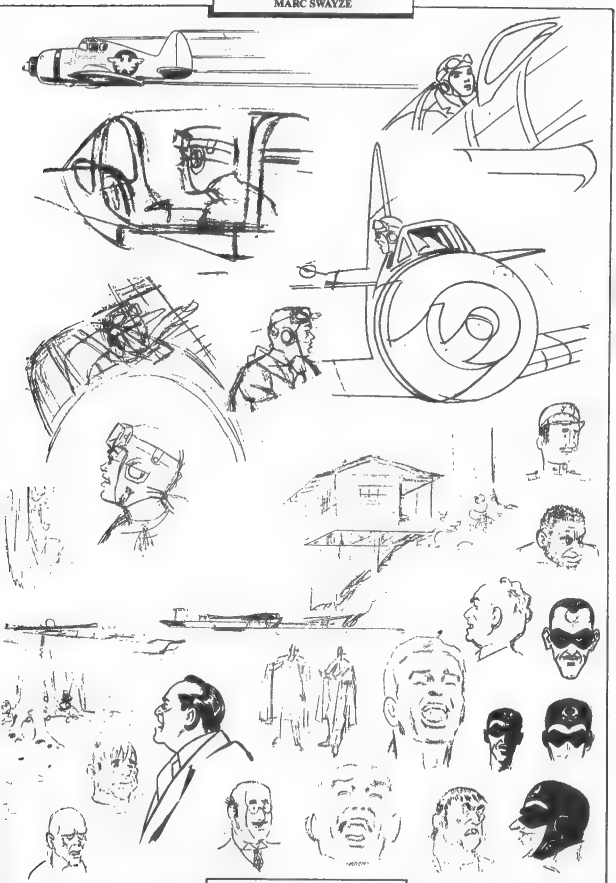
I am especially proud of the volume of romantic comics I produced. One issue, for example, LIFE STORY #21, contains my art throughout -- all three stories. In COWBOY LOVE #2, two of the three stories were drawn by me. All in all, my work appeared in 10 different Fawcett romance comic-book titles, a total of 69 stories, and was featured as the lead story in 45 of the issues I have on hand. And as I've said, the work was all mine, with the exception of the lettering, which was done by my sister. We took pride in the fact that when we mailed each story to New York, it was camera-ready.

JOHN: *Now, to draw a feature such as "Phantom Eagle," you had to have some knowledge of planes. Was research mandatory, or did you just use your imagination a lot?*

MARC: My approach was to rough in the planes the way I wanted them in relation to the story, then get out the file material for detail. I suppose that would be employing both imagination and research. I redesigned the Phantom Eagle's plane after taking over the feature in 1944, endeavouring to create a small, easily identifiable jet that reflected Phan-

Dynamic splash panel from CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES #15.

More sketchbook material by Mr. Swayze, with some "finished" pieces.



"I had no urge to bring anything into comics that wasn't

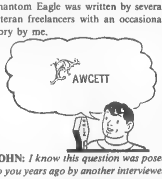
tom Eagle's character. Due to the volume of work I had taken on, which included the FLYIN' JENNY Sunday page and later the daily strip, time was of extreme importance; therefore all the fussy detail was omitted from the plane.

JOHN: *That brings two questions to mind. First of all, do you know who created the Phantom Eagle?*

MARC: No, I don't. Probably **Bill Parker**, who dreamed up many of the Fawcett characters and titles. I believe Phantom Eagle, along with such features as "Mr. Scarlet," "Prince Ibis" and "Golden Arrow," was in existence when I first joined the Fawcett staff. When I took it over in '44 it was being done by the **Binder** studio. **Will Lieberson** and I discussed the feature before I brought the assignment South with me, and the general understanding was that I was to do anything I wanted to do with it — changes, that is. I changed the title logo completely and did away with the six or seven young flyers representing Allied countries, who followed Phantom Eagle everywhere he went — and had to be drawn! I connected him with a commercial aviation firm and centered the interest around him, his girl friend, and a few minor associates. I think I must have been readying the feature for peacetime. Phantom Eagle was a fun job — both writing and drawing. I regret that there is little possibility that it will ever appear in reprints because much of the opposition was the Rising Sun.

JOHN: *Well, who knows? In the wake of the 30th anniversary of Pearl Harbor's bombing, and in view of some of the anti-Japanese sentiment here in the States, now might be the time to reprint Phantom Eagle! The second question: when you were working on "Phantom Eagle" and FLYIN' JENNY simultaneously, did you have any trouble keeping them separate? Both, after all, were aviation-oriented. I would assume that Phantom Eagle operated in more of a fantasy/sf realm than did FLYIN' JENNY, and likely this helped to keep them apart.*

MARC: Had I been writing both features I might have had that trouble. But Phantom Eagle was written by several veteran freelancers with an occasional story by me.



JOHN: *I know this question was posed to you years ago by another interviewer, Matt Lage, but I'm going to repeat it mainly because of my own interest in your answer, and the information it brings out. When you wrote stories which you were also going to draw, did you try to bring elements of sophistication into the stories, or was that frowned upon by the editors?*

MARC: I had no urge to be bringing anything into comics that wasn't already there. The Fawcett policies were immaculate. The books were put together primarily for young people and as far as I could tell were never suggestive in any way. To illustrate, I was with Charlton Publications for a brief period in 1955. Some of their material consisted of reprints from other publishers, one being Fawcett. All such material went through a laundering process for approval by the Comics Code office which had been established since original publication. The material from some publishers had to undergo tremendous revision, cleavage, scanty attire, dialogue modification. Fawcett's merely had to have some words like "cop" and "guy" changed to "police officer" and "fellow." When I wrote for Fawcett, I did it with the purpose of getting editorial approval, without which a writer does not sell. One of the best ways not to get approval was to violate an editorial taboo. I also knew that a certain percentage of the Captain Marvel scripts were of the light humor type. I tried to fill that need.

JOHN: *I'm tempted to start editorializing again, about how great the Fawcett folks were and how I wish that current comics creators could have similar attitudes toward the field. You should see the stuff that appears today in the Code-approved books, to say nothing of the books not even submitted to the Code. It's awful, raunchy, terrible. And it isn't even well done most of the time! Anyway, back to the interview. You moved back to Monroe in . . .*

MARC: 1945, with the Fawcett assignment I've already mentioned, plus FLYIN' JENNY Sunday pages. After Keaton's death that year, I drew the JENNY daily strip as well. After Fawcett comics ceased in 1954, I worked on various features for Charlton Publications. Of the Charlton work I like THIS IS SUSPENSE #26, which contains two stories I wrote and drew, and YOUNG LOVERS #16 and SWEETHEART DIARY #34, for which I drew two stories each.

MARC: You prepared some other work for syndication, didn't you?

MARC: Over my 15-year career, I must

THE GREAT PIERRE, an unpublished strip from 1956. Swayze felt it was "the best I ever did".

AT DAYBREAK PIERRE AND HIS PARTY RESUME THEIR STRUGGLE THROUGH THE HEAVY JUNGLE OF SWAMP LAFORET...
AND HOURS LATER THEY COME UPON A CLEARING IN THE CENTER OF WHICH TOWERS A GREAT MOUND...
WHAT'S THE BIG HUMP, PIERRE?

already there. The Fawcett policies were immaculate."

JANGO
WHILE A FEW MILES AWAY, ON A LONELY STRETCH OF HIGHWAY....
MY HAT BLEW OUT OF THE CAR! IF YOU'LL PULL OVER I'LL RUN BACK AND...
AS THE CAR COMES TO A HALT THE GIRL LEANS BACK OUT OF HER COMPANION'S WAY, AND...

Two versions of JANGO, another newspaper strip created by Marc. The top strip is from 1941-42, while the version below was done in 1953 — rendered in "my own natural style", says Swayze.

have prepared at least 15 ideas for features. They may be interesting for showing a variety of styles, some fast, some detailed, some cartoony, some illustrative. Some of the ideas would have made it but for my own actors. For instance, there was a feature I called MARTY GUY, PRIVATE DETECTIVE for the NEW YORK STAR, that would have been syndicated had I not been obstinate about the editorial demands in their contract. And THE GREAT PIERRE, a feature the Bell Syndicate was to release in newspapers in 1955, but I decided to get out of comics completely. I have originals and copies of many of these syndicate attempts, and I think they are good. I was just a poor salesman.

JOHN: *We've talked mainly about your career in comics and art in general, but I knew you've done other things. Why not tell us about them?*

MARC: In baseball, I thought I was a pretty good amateur, and played a little semi-pro ball before moving on to other things. I played music with a number of dance bands and jazz combos. During World War II I was fortunate to be chosen to accompany **Bing Crosby** and get to know a nice guy in Bing.

JOHN: *Do you know how many of your old associates are still alive? Do you keep in touch with any of them?*

MARC: I have done a miserable job of keeping in touch with my old associates — which is probably why I am something of a forgotten man of comics. Over the years I stayed in touch only with Rod, Wendell and **Beck**, and that was due to their knowing that I needed constant prodding, I suspect.

JOHN: *Well, finally, tell us about Marc Swayze in the present day: Just anything you'd like us to know that'd help us get to know you better as a person and not just as a retired Golden Age artist.*

MARC: I am a fortunate man. Blessed is a better word. Sitting across the room is my wife, June — cuter, I swear, than she was when I first saw her singing in a band, in 1942. She's smart, witty, wise, talented. She paints, sings, plays the organ at church, and has taught school for years. More important than all of these, she bore me five wonderful children and did a pretty good job of raising them. We have three daughters, a housewife/tennis player, a schoolteacher and a secretary. Our son is an M.D., as is his wife. We lost our first son, Marc Jr., in 1975. God helped me through that. I paint. I've been painting in oils since high school. I play music in a Dixieland band and in a trio. I play golf — every day — twelve months a year. You'd think, after 52 years of it, I'd play a whale of a game, but as they say, it comes and it goes.

JOHN: *You've just mentioned a number of things I think readers need to hear. So many of today's comics creators seem to be conceited, self-centered boors who don't have anything approaching or resembling a real life. Certainly hardly any of them have any concept of relying on God for help or have much of any kind of life outside of the fantasy world in which they operate. Marc, you're a grand fellow, just as I've always heard that you were. Thanks so much for your time and for sharing your memories with us.*

MARC: You're crazy, John . . . I'm also a conceited, self-centered boor. But it's nice working with you.

"I never had a high opinion of my ability. I wanted to

MIKE ROYER

Mike Royer has had an illustrious career as a cartoonist and inker working with many of the industry's giants. Mike has inked such greats as Jack Kirby, and was an assistant for Russ Manning for a number of years. Royer is now Manager of Character Art for Consumer Resources/Walt Disney Company Consumer Products.

Here in Part Two, Royer reveals behind-the-scenes stories of comics, including Russ Manning, Marvel animation, Dave Stevens, ROCKETEER, DARKWING DUCK, Bill Stout, Alex Toth, and Steve Rude, among others!

MIKE ROYER: You come into my office with a beautiful woman from a foreign country with a delightful accent and the cutest overbite I've ever seen — and you want to talk about comics?

PAUL POWER: *Uh, yeah.*

MIKE: Oh, okay! *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *You wanted to tell us about Russ Manning?*

MIKE: I still have nightmares where in the dream I'm driving into the country and Russ is still alive. We even discuss the fact in the dream; it's like, "Russ, you're still alive." And he says, "Don't tell anybody." *(Laughter.)* And then he says, "Here's fifteen pages of stuff I needed yesterday." For some reason when I have nightmares that deal with overwork, they deal with Russ.

PAUL: *Was he a workaholic?*

MIKE: To a degree. I think Russ had some things to prove. Not necessarily to the rest of the world and mainstream publishers, but also to himself. In his early years he submitted work to both Marvel and DC and he was told it wasn't acceptable according to their standards. That was strange for a guy that was an incredible designer and could out-design most of the guys working in comics during that time. He was always proving to himself as well as to the other people. I think I've also sort of adopted that *modus operandi* in my work because every job I do is not just to prove something to other people that only remember the years that I inked, but to prove to myself that I'm not just an inker. I don't like to ink; I've had enough of it. Every once in awhile I can do a job where **Ray Zone**, in STARLOG, will talk about what I've done, and I've just finished pencilling a job that he will describe as the most fantastic pencils he's ever seen.

PAUL: *As of this moment you've just shown me a job you did involving Disney characters. Can you talk about it?*

MIKE: A few weeks ago **Marv Wolfman** asked me if I'd be interested in doing a DARKWING DUCK 3-D story for the DISNEY ADVENTURES DIGEST, found at supermarket check-out stands everywhere, and I said yes. We met with **Ray Zone** and we talked about the different things we could do. **David Cody Weiss** came up with a synopsis and we decided to do it Marvel style. I went home

These two pages: Golden Sound Story "ROBIN HOOD" (1992). Both are pencilled by Mike. Stan Drake's inks are below; next page shows Mike's pen and brush.

MAGNUS, Golden Sound Story "ROBIN HOOD" ©1993 Western Publishing Company / "Conan" Yarn © 1993 Ironclaw Records / MICKEY MOUSE ADVENTURES TM & ©1993 The Walt Disney Company / SADMAN'S SIX ©1993 Jack Kirby / X-MEN, NEW MUTANTS, FANTASTIC FOUR TM & ©1993 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. / FANTASTIC FOUR cartoon ©1967 Hanna-Barbera, Inc. / EAST MEETS WEST ©1993 Paul S. Power / IN THE DAYS OF THE MOB ©1971 Hampshire

do comics and found I could make a living inking."

and visually did the story so it could run without one line of dialogue. I had a ball with it. If I had to make a living at it I would be starving as a result of this story, but I had a hell of a lot of fun doing it. I'm delighted with the favorable response I've gotten from Marv and **Ray Zone.**

PAUL: *Ray, of course, does the 3-D material.*

MIKE: Oh, yeah, **Ray Zone** is like "Mr. 3-D" and I do not say that with a turn of my tongue in my cheek. I'm dead serious — when it comes to 3-D the man is a genius. Knowing full well what Ray is capable of doing I wanted him to look at every page of this story and just go wild. Some of the stuff will be 30 levels deep.

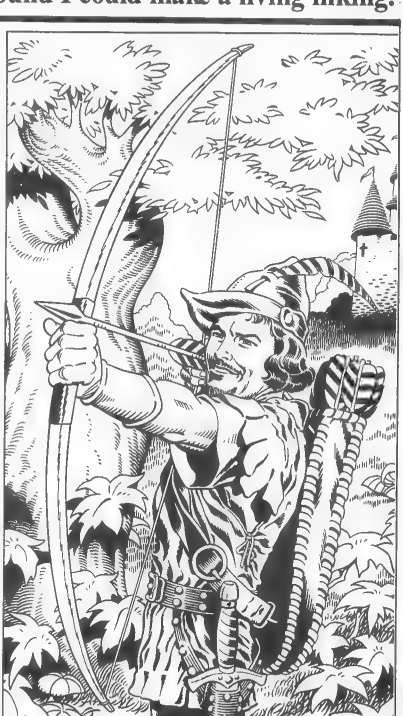
PAUL: *That reminds me, when I introduced you over at Neal Adams' studio to do the ROCKETEER thing, there were two books going at once. One book was the Russ Heath film adaptation and the other was the 3-D book which was a read-along book.*

MIKE: I didn't know how to write the credits on the inside front cover. I was given an 18-page transcription of a 25-minute audio-adventure/radio show version of THE ROCKETEER and was told, "We want 44 pages." I literally wrote a 44-page comic book that had to match all of the dialogue on the tape because the reader would read along and listen to the tape at the same time. In the case of the narrative sections I could have the first two or three words so the reader wouldn't get lost, but we didn't need all of the dialogue since the pictures told the story. I did the pencils and then turned them over to Continuity. Continuity fine-tuned the work and Neal would tweak some of the layouts and do the finished art. When it came time to write the credits, the general public, the buying public for this book really doesn't give a damn about who did what on the book. The comics community, well, that's a different story. We wanted them to know that it was **Neal Adams'** artwork so I simply put in the credits, script/visualization/art direction, which to me explained what I did. In STARLOG SPECTACULAR #5 **Ray Zone** mentioned two outstanding 3-D efforts, THE BATMAN and THE ROCKETEER. Ray took the opportunity to describe my part in the book and he felt that I was the unsung hero of the book. Ray, bless his heart, tooted my horn for me.

PAUL: *You're not very good at doing that.*

MIKE: I never really had a high opinion of my ability. When I came to California I wanted to do comic books and I found that I could make a living and support my wife and children by specializing in inking. I spent a lot of years raising a family, three gifted children and an ex-wife that is gifted in her own right. I spent all of those years developing my talent as an inker but not as an artist. In the past few years I've finally started to learn something. Each job I pencil I've been proving to myself that I can do it. And I've proved it to other people as well.

PAUL: *What did you do during the period when Jack Kirby tells you he's going from Marvel to DC but he can't*



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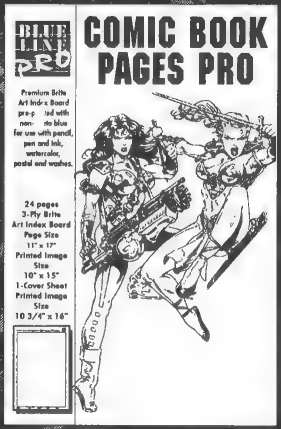
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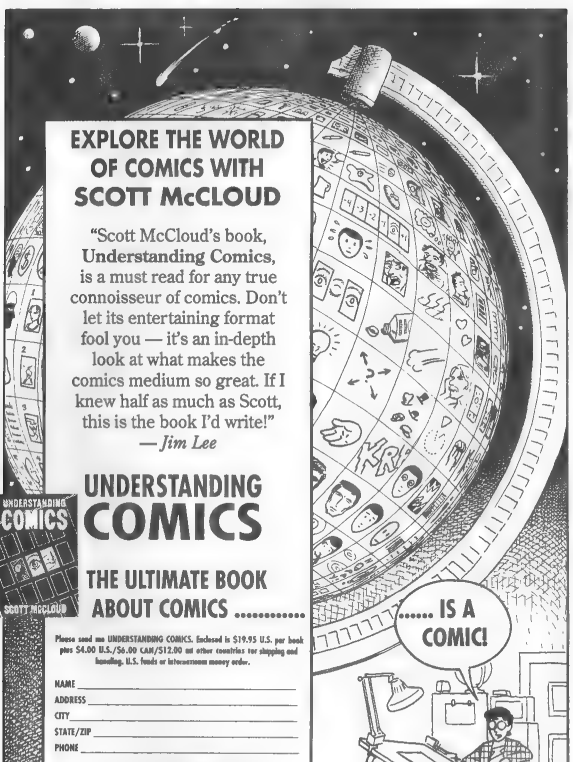
"I worked by day selling paint for Sherman Williams."

Detail of Mike's latest "Cruisin' Years" cover: written, pencilled, inked and lettered by Royer.

tell you what he's working on? [See part one, last issue, for details.]

MIKE: I did a lot of work for **Russ Manning.** I also did all kinds of work for Western Publishing that people will never know about. I drew and inked coloring books, I worked on THE HERCULOIDS and SHAZAM; I even did six covers for the Hanna-Barbera TV superheroes comic books. This is stuff that nobody knows I ever did. When I came to California in 1965 I started assisting with **Russ Manning.** I just showed up in his back yard and he, bless his heart, gave me work when he couldn't afford it and didn't need the help. He saw some of my artwork and wrote to me and said that if he ever needed an assistant I'd be the one. So I showed up in his back yard one day. I worked by day selling paint for Sherman Williams. Nights and weekends I worked for Russ. After eleven months in California I went into Marvel and got a job working on AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, the animated TV show. There were 22 episodes laid out on the west coast and I laid out over one third of those shows. I was naive. I was a cartoonist union member, but they hired this business manager that had worked in construction. He said that if you don't work in the physical plant you don't get screen credit. I could have gone to the union and they would have said, "What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"I was doing in 22 hours what the others were doing in 40."

the hell is going on? The guy gets screen credit." Between MARVEL SUPER HEROES and the SPIDER-MAN series there was a six-week lay-off. I went back and was working full-time for Russ and Western Publishing. There was a period of time I didn't work on SPIDER-MAN and the studio called me back up and said they wanted me to work on it full-time. I told them I couldn't, that I was working at home, but that I could give them 22 hours a week. After working at home for three or four weeks, 22 hours a week, the director, the late, great **Grant Simmons, said**, "Mike, all the layout guys on staff are madder than hell at you." I asked what I did wrong and he said that what I was doing in 22 hours was what the guys were doing in-house, and on staff, in 40 hours. So he said, "Just keep doing the 22 hours and bill me for 40." *(Laughter.)* So I did!

PAUL: *Did you get screen credit?*

MIKE: No, the only stuff I got screen credit for is where my name is buried in the MARVEL SUPER HERO credits. I got screen credit for the old BANANA SPLITS show because I did Assistant Layout work on that and THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

PAUL: *That was another show Alex Toth did layouts for.*

MIKE: Yeah, and they were amazing. It's like if you knew nothing about fencing, if you had his model sheets, you could draw fencing and convince people you know all about it.

PAUL: *Do you think he ever took fencing?*

MIKE: Yeah, he told me about it. He took fencing when he was in New York. I met Alex when I was in California in 1965. I went to his house and I was there for like 12 hours. I'm sure his wife loved that. We took a break to watch JONNY QUEST reruns and I ate there. It was great!

PAUL: *Do you remember what it was that first got you interested in drawing and comics?*

MIKE: Definitely my mom. She read science fiction pulps. The EC science fiction comic books were mentioned in an editorial column in one of the science fiction pulps in the 1950s. My mom would pick up WEIRD SCIENCE and WEIRD FANTASY. That's how I discovered EC. I had no interest in the horror stuff; I didn't like it. The stuff scared me as a 10-year-old kid. The science fiction stuff turned me on. I discovered TWO FISTED TALES and then out of that came MAD and MAD magazine. All that stuff influenced me as a kid . . . *and* I

Mike's unbelievably complete pencils from Disney Comics' MICKEY MOUSE ADVENTURES.

"Why didn't I find this excitement when I had a

KING ARTHUR DID MY THINKING! IT WAS MY SWORD THAT DID THE DOING! NO KNIGHT WAS EQUAL TO BOLDER DEEDS THAN I!
THEN HOW COME I NEVER HEARD OF YOU?!
FATUOUS, POMPOUS KNAVE! I'VE EARNED A PLACE SOMEWHERE! BRIAN BLUE-DRAGON MUST HAVE A CAUSE TO DEFEND!
I'VE TOLD YOU TIME AND AGAIN...
CHIVALRY DIED HERE A LONG TIME AGO!

Mike's inking over Kirby's newest creation from Topps Comics — SATAN'S SIX. Royer is among a half-dozen comic greats inking Jack on this project.

discovered the classic **Alex Raymond** FLASH GORDON and the **Hal Foster** TARZAN in the bottom of a trunk in my grandmother's attic. My mother, as a young girl, saved these strips out of the paper and put them in the trunk. So my interest in drawing, movies, and everything, comes from my mother. My mom was the one that told me as a kid, as she took me and my cousins down to see KING KONG in the '50s, "You know, there was a SON OF KONG out; there were seven FRANKENSTEINS." As a kid I read **Bradbury** and **Pohl.** I owe it all to Mom and Dad, it's that simple.

My earliest memories of doing things with my dad consisted of going to see **Randolph Scott** and **Joel McCray** double features on Thursday night because Thursday night was western night. There for awhile my dad and I were estranged because he was the hunter, the fisherman. I didn't like to cut the heads off of fish. I didn't like to go out into the woods and kill Bambi. I wanted to be an artist. And Dad would say, "An artist?" Finally my dad accepted the fact that I wanted to be an artist. I remember my dad asking if I had any westerns with **Lafe McKee** in it. Not only did I know who the hell he was talking about but we sat down and watched a western together with **Lafe McKee** in it from my 16-mm film collection. Now my dad and I get along. Well, like I said, everything that I am is because of my parents.

PAUL: *It's up to parents to recognize the talents that their children are given.*

MIKE: My dad never discouraged me; he just never necessarily encouraged me. His upbringing was different. His family was wiped out by the dust bowl and they migrated to the west coast. All he ever knew was working harder than hell to support his siblings, four sisters. Then he took on another family to raise. What I did growing up was not what he perceived as the manly arts.

PAUL: *You were working with Russ on the TARZAN stuff. What else were you involved with?*

MIKE: I worked with Hanna-Barbera, I inked DONALD DUCK and MICKEY MOUSE, all kinds of stuff. For awhile it was tough getting the amount of revenue I was getting when working with Jack so I was doing a lot of different jobs. Hell, I was inking three pages a day for Jack.

I was telling **Marv Wolfman** the other day that I was delighted with how pleased he was with DARKWING DUCK. On one hand, we both worked for the same company; he was the editor for the DISNEY ADVENTURE DIGEST. On the other hand, Marv was like a big, important person at Marvel and DC over the years. So when Marv gives me a job, I'm not working for Marv who is an editor at Disney, I'm working against every artist that has ever drawn something for Marv. Marv said he gave me the job because he knew it would be nice, but that he had no idea that I would go nuts with it and that it would become such a labor of love. That means a hell of a lot to me. It's a shame that it took me to age 50 to get excited about what I'm doing! *(Laughter.)* Why didn't I find this excitement in my mid-20s when I had a wife, three kids, a mortgage and all of that shit to take care of?

wife, kids, mortgage, all that shit to take care of?"

PAUL: *I think it's always been there; it just hadn't bubbled to the surface. I think because you've been an inker for so long you spent most of your time getting excited over other people's work. Chic Stone said the same thing about inking for so long. When NEMESIS came along he took it because he wanted to draw to be able to express. Stan never asked him to draw anything while he was at Marvel.*

MIKE: A lot of times something that you do is a means to an end. Maybe what you spend most of your life at enables you to pay the mortgage, send flowers to your wife, put the kids through school. It doesn't allow you the opportunity to take chances. When I became unmarried 12 years ago I thought about taking all of those chances that I couldn't take when I was married. Then all of a sudden, when the opportunity was there, I wasn't sure if that was what I wanted. I spent a few years trying to figure out what the hell I wanted to do. I can now tell you that this is the most excited I've ever been about drawing in my entire life.

PAUL: *What are some of the things that didn't excite you?*

MIKE: In KA-ZAR #1, which **Mike Friedrich** wrote, I cleaned up **Paul Reinman** pencils, a fate worse than death. *(Laughter.)* There were three pages that Mike had me completely redraw. So when the originals were split up, guess who kept those pages. Paul did. I'm sure he went in and the penciller was given first refusal on the pages he wanted. Over at DC I did pencils over **Ric Estrada's** layouts, inked and lettered FREEDOM FIGHTERS. When his layouts came in I sat down at the lightboard and re-did everything so that I could send back to DC his layouts. That way he could have no claim to original art. And then in the letters column they write about this innovative way that Mike Royer did this issue of FREEDOM FIGHTERS by doing it on a lightboard. That's the way they did the Western Publishing comics from the beginning because they were being done by animation artists from the movie industry.

PAUL: *It's nice to see you drawing more. We've known each other for like 20 years and I've been telling you all along that you should be drawing more.*

MIKE: It's interesting because I'm now pushing myself more than I've ever done before. I'm accepting challenges and creating challenges for myself. When I get something like THE ROCKETEER or DICK TRACY or full pencils on DARKWING DUCK I lay it out differently than I would have five years ago. Five years ago I would have done it a little safer. I try to push myself with everything. I try to create challenges and then try to meet them. I'm having fun pushing myself. Success is the progressive realization of a goal. The problem is that if you don't set goal's and strive for them, you won't have any success.

PAUL: *The bottom line is that cartooning is hard work. How would you characterize your work habits?*

MIKE: I have to do what I see a lot of the younger guys have been doing over the years. I can't tell you how many lunches

Interviewer Paul Power's pencils under Mike's inks, featuring Marvel's mutants.

SOME PEOPLE AREN'T TOO HAPPY ABOUT THAT, THE JUGGERNAUT AND BLACK TOM HAVE FORMED AN ALLIANCE WITH THE RED SHEIK AND HIS SUPER APES IN AN ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE DOC SAMSON'S EXPERIMENTAL PLANE! GAMMA FAN DOC SAMSON'S BEING CONDUCTED IN THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK!
IT'S PROFESSOR XAVIER'S BIRTHDAY!
WOLVERINE'S TRACKING SKILLS HAVE BROUGHT BOTH X-MEN AND NEW MUTANTS TO ARNHEIMLAND, THEN ON TO A-
SHOW DOWN AT AYERS ROCK!
BLAM BLAM BLAM
SCRIPT/PENCILS PAUL S POWER INKS/LETTERING MIKE ROYER

"We can't do things differently so why think about it?"

I've spent drawing on the backs of napkins or place mats. You have to force yourself to draw in environments where you can't look at the last model sheet you did. I did a couple of gigs for one of the studios that had a DISCOVER party and four hours I sat and drew sketches for everybody that stood in line. One of the perks of the party was that you got a sketch from a Disney cartoonist. I told them I drew Mickey, Donald and Goofy. For a guy interested in opera, I did Goofy screaming his lungs out into a microphone. I had to draw these things in like four minutes. You do that and you learn a lot about your abilities.

PAUL: *If you had your druthers would you do things differently?*

MIKE: If I were starting over again? Sure, but I don't think that's a valid question. We can't do anything differently so why think about it? I think that if I knew then what I know now I would have taken an entirely different career. I'd have been a gigolo. *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *You still want to draw comics, though?*

MIKE: I would still like to get back to the character I created nearly 20 years ago and copyrighted and own the rights to — a character based on characters from Finnish mythology. I saw this silly little Finnish movie titled THE DAY THE EARTH FROZE and I thought, what a great epic saga this would make. I did some stuff with the male characters and decided I wanted women so I turned the character Anarchy into a female barbarian that runs around in this huge diaper and a jeweled girdle and a monstrous sword. At least I got satisfaction that some guys in Finland saw the first printing in **Denis Kitchen's** HIGH ADVENTURE comic and they bought reprint rights and published it in Finland. They thought it was great and it was nice that they weren't upset that I bastardized Finnish characters.

PAUL: *I also wanted to ask you a few questions about Bill Stout. I recall that a lot of California cartoonists got involved with work through you in one way or another. Am I wrong there?*

MIKE: I guess I might have had a hand in a few things. I remember recommending

Some of Royer's early MAGNUS work — issue 19 of the original series.

PLEASE! I...WE WANT TO MAKE UP FOR THE HARM WE'VE DONE!
VERY WELL! EVERY-ONE TURN OFF YOUR COMMUNICATORS! DERKAISER USES THEM TO MONITOR US!
SHORTLY...
MAGNUS! SOMETHING'S WRONG... THE ZONE OF DREAD...
IT'S BEEN TURNED UP... FULL FORCE!
EEEE!
COMING RIGHT THROUGH ...OUR SHIELDS!
TERROR
PANIC!

"What impressed me about Kraft was professionalism."

Bill Stout to **Russ Manning** at one point before I left. Bill went to work for Russ so I suppose I had a hand in it. I met Bill through fandom and science fiction conventions. I can remember when Bill was working at Disneyland he still had long hair but wore a short haircut wig to pass the stringent Disney employment rules. We also met at some of the early San Diego conventions.

PAUL: *I wanted to ask you about your work inking the STAR WARS strip with Russ.*

MIKE: Well, before that, I wanted to mention a sidebar concerning the work on the TARZAN strip. For eons the SANTA ANA REGISTER had always carried the TARZAN comic strip. For a while, Russ was working on the TARZAN *and* the STAR WARS strip. It was like a three-month period. Russ started signing the TARZAN strip "Russ and **Royer.**" Well, the first week that Russ signed our name to the TARZAN strip the SANTA ANA REGISTER decided to drop the TARZAN strip — *after* running it for 40 years. It was depressing. I couldn't pick up the REGISTER and point to my name in print. *(Laughter.)* Russ was such a perfectionist that he was falling behind. The work load was just incredible for one man to write and pencil both strips. It was hectic work but it helped me to continue living at the meager lifestyle I had achieved at this point in my career. Out of the blue I got a phone call saying they needed some help at Disney Studios. I was turned over to the editor at their foreign-strip division and I produced comic-strip pages for all of the non-English-speaking countries that subscribed to their services. I also produced some domestic strips and freelanced as an inker and letterer for stuff like the Disney Christmas strip and things of that nature. That was around 1979. In May of 1979 I got a phone call from Disney and they said they wanted to talk to me about my future. I figured they were going to offer me an inking assignment on one of their titles. They actually offered me a full-time job on staff in their Creative Services for Publications in Consumer Products Division. I went back to Russ and said it was a case of full-time work and benefits and I hate to bail out, but it's a great opportunity. Russ said that I should take it. I think that was about the time **Dave Stevens** linked up with Russ. People would always go and visit Russ. **Shel Dorf** would visit and bring a crew of aspiring artists from the San Diego area. I met **Dave Stevens** when he was 19 years old.

PAUL: *I think Dave met Russ before then, because Dave and I were already working together on GODZILLA over at Hanna-Barbera. Dave worked on the strip and then Rick Hoberg did it*

MIKE: You're right, we produced all of the stuff in the 1970s for the foreign TARZAN comics.

PAUL: *When I was in Australia I was aware of a whole group of cartoonists that came out of the Russ Manning school.*

MIKE: Oh sure, **Bill Stout, Dave Stevens, Rick Hoberg,** the list goes on and on.

Here's a western side of Mike Royer that few people know of: His love of horses.

PAUL: *You also worked with David Anthony Kraft!*

MIKE: That's right! I don't remember the time frame, but it was when **DAK** was working for Marvel. It was either a Hulk story or a story in which the Hulk was a lead character. I lettered the issue, one of the few times I did just lettering on a book for Marvel. The thing that impressed me the most about **Kraft** as a writer was his professionalism. Most writers in the "Marvel" style would do their outline or synopsis, the artist would literally choreograph the story, and then the writer would

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ZEN
INTERGALACTIC NINJA™

ISSUE #0

Art and Story by Superstar Bill Maus
Premium Foil-Stamped Cover
Coming June '93

ENTITY COMICS

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"I wanted the reader to feel the penciller inked himself."

write the snappy dialogue. Dave did the work the same way, except that he would put tissue paper over the art and make sure that what he wrote would fit in the space available and not screw up the balance of the artwork and the spatial relationships. That impressed me because he not only cared about what he was writing, but he cared and understood that the art and the lettering were part of the same piece of art.

PAUL: *As opposed to, say, Roy Thomas?*

MIKE: Right, and I'm not bad-mouthing Roy Thomas, by any means. I love the guy. I lettered a CONAN he wrote and I had a hell of a time fitting the lettering into the space provided without screwing up the artwork. DAK was one of the guys in the late '60s and early '70s who would always come out to visit during the San Diego conventions. The weather was perfect that time of year and the guys would come over and sleep out in my back yard.

PAUL: *You also inked over Steve Ditko at DC. How were his pencils?*

MIKE: We talked about this earlier; the fact that when I inked somebody I wanted the reader to get the feeling that the penciller had inked himself. The only thing that bothered me was that at times Steve pencilled as if he was going to ink the work. I don't look at those jobs with a great deal of pride because I wish that the work could have looked more like Steve had inked it. They were decent ink jobs but they weren't Steve Ditko.

Speaking of inking, I want to mention that I inked one PLASTIC MAN and it was probably the best money I ever made in comic books. I don't know what the hell it was about those pencils, or maybe the mood I was in, but I inked five pages a day on PLASTIC MAN.

PAUL: *When I was working with Alex Toth we would talk about PLASTIC MAN and we would comment on how nice it would be if the two of you could do a job together. Alex was opposed to all of that brush work because when he was coming up everyone wanted him to draw like Raymond. He said he always wanted to do WILDCAT and PLASTIC MAN and that he thought you would have been the perfect inker.*

MIKE: If I were to ink Alex I would ink him as if he were doing the inks. When

More pencil and ink work from Mike's artistic past at Marvel Comics.

MR. BARTON...
WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY?
SURE... I LIKE MONEY FINE!
BUT IT KINDA DEPENDS ON WHAT I HAVE TO DO FOR IT!
LET ME TAKE JANET ACROSS THE BORDER INTO MEXICO! THEY WILL LOCK HER AWAY FROM THE SUN FOREVER! HERE!
I HAVE GAINED WEALTH-POWER--! I CAN PAY YOU AS FEW MEN CAN!
NO, I GUESS NOT!
WHISPER AND ME SPLIT FIFTY-FIFTY! I KNOW HE'D NEVER GO FOR THAT DEAL...
...SO... IT'S A MEXICAN STAND-OFF--!
YOU TURNED HIM DOWN TOO FAST, LANK!
WE DIDN'T FIND OUT HOW MUCH HE'D OFFER...
...OR WHY HIS DAUGHTER CALLS HIM A MONSTER!
SNAP
CLOPS!
EXPLETIVE DELETED
SLASH!

THE 25th CENTURY. THEY NEED NO DEATH PENALTY. THEY HAVE

CYCOPS™

THEY ARE MORE THAN HUMAN.

HE IS LESS.

WHEN HE COMES FOR THEM, NOTHING WILL EVER BE THE SAME!

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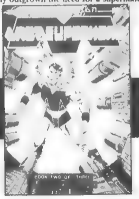
Today, some say there are too many superheroes. Imagine a tomorrow in which mankind has come of age, and only one superhero — the original superhero — survives! Has man finally outgrown the need for a superman? This is the story of The Last Superhero.



FICTIONEER BOOKS LTD., 234 FIFTH AVE SUITE 301, NEW YORK, NY 10001

"Bill Stout can do art people swear Manning did."

Russ inked Alex he totally obliterated his work. I inked a couple of KA-ZARs that **Don Heck** pencilled and I want to tell you, when I was finished you would have sworn **Don Heck** inked it! I got in trouble with Marvel because they wanted it to look like **Joe Sinnott.** They didn't tell me — they just sent me the pages and said ink 'em!

PAUL: *How did you meet Paul Norris?*

MIKE: I had a publication that reprinted the adventures of BRICK BRADFORD that he wrote and drew. He was interviewed by the publisher and he was asked if he ever had an assistant. He said no, but in the only instance that ever came close to him having an assistant was when I inked his stuff at Western Publishing. Paul knew that I was trying to make the inks look like his inks with the few exceptions on TARZAN where I was forced to make it look like **Manning.** That's the type of stuff **Maurice Horn** looks at in his History of Comics and then says things like, **Norris** and **Royer** continue TARZAN in a degree of mediocrity.

PAUL: *Well, what the hell, he'll never be coming around your house for dinner.*

MIKE: That's for damn sure! *(Laughter.)*

PAUL: *How was it that there seems to be this core group of people that keep popping up, Dave Stevens, Bill Stout. How did you meet all of them?*

MIKE: Well, I'd have to say that I met all of them through southern California fandom. Either at the San Diego Con or the West Coast Science Fiction Convention.

PAUL: *What I find interesting is that most of those people were brush men and they all ended up working with Russ Manning. Didn't you introduce most of these guys to Russ?*

MIKE: I remember recommending **Bill Stout.** Of all the people I know, Bill can do a piece of art that people would swear Russ had done. The guy is a hell of an artist.

PAUL: *Look at all of that great dinosaur stuff he did.*

MIKE: It's funny you mention that. For years I kept telling Russ, "Why don't you take Tarzan back to Pellucidar?" And then one day Russ came up to me and said, "You know, I think I'll take Tarzan back to Pellucidar." *(Laughter.)* At about the time I left Russ to go back to ink for Kirby, Russ decides to take Tarzan to Pellucidar. So guess who gets to ink Tarzan going back to Pellucidar — **Bill Stout!**

PAUL: *I do have a last question I have to ask. What do you think of today's comics?*

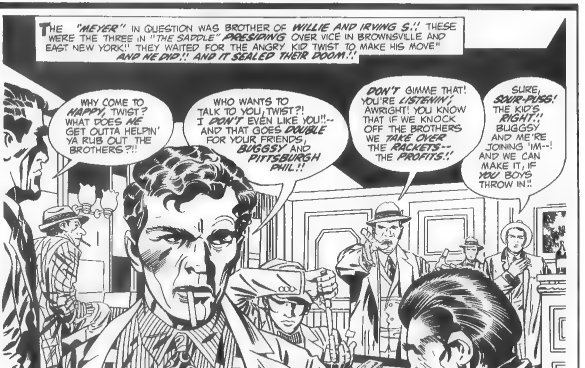
ONE THIS ISSUE FOR YOUR GRANDCHILDREN! IT'S MERELY A LANDMARK IN THE HISTORY OF COMICS!!
IT CAME FROM THE FIERY JAWS OF HOLOCAUST!
"THE
JACK
JACK KIRBY'S
NEW GODS
NEW YORK CITY BECOMES A BATTLEGROUND FOR THE GODS--!
THE DEATH-WISH OF TERRIBLE TURPIN

MIKE: Oh boy! I don't look at them.

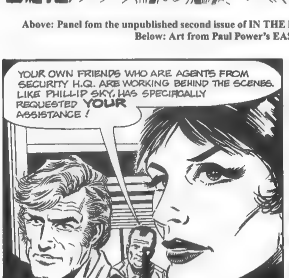
PAUL: *Come on, you look at some now and then, don't you?*

MIKE: There is one comic I pick up on a regular basis and another that's no longer published. That's the SHADOW STRIKES series, which I liked because it was a period piece. I also pick up the

"All my idols I've met turn out to be fabulous people."


THE "MEYER" IN QUESTION WAS BROTHER OF WILLIE AND IRVING S.!! THESE WERE THE THREE IN "THE SADDLE" PRESIDING OVER VICE IN BROWNSVILLE AND EAST NEW YORK!! THEY WAITED FOR THE ANGRY KID TWIST TO MAKE HIS MOVE" AND HE DID!! AND IT SEALED THEIR DOOM!!
WHY COME TO HARRY, TWIST? WHAT DOES HE GET OUTTA HELPIN' YA RUB OUT THE BROTHERS?!
WHO WANTS TO TALK TO YOU, TWIST?! I DON'T EVEN LIKE YOU!!-- AND THAT GOES DOUBLE FOR YOUR FRIENDS -- BUGSSY AND PITTSBURGH PHIL!!
DON'T GIMME THAT! YOU'RE LISTENIN'! AWRIGHT! YOU KNOW THAT IF WE KNOCK OFF THE BROTHERS WE TAKE OVER THE RACKETS-- THE PROFITS!!
SURE, SOUR-PUSS! THE KID'S RIGHT!! BUGGSY AND ME'RE JOINING 'IM-- AND WE CAN MAKE IT, IF YOU BOYS THROW IN!

Above: Panel fom the unpublished second issue of IN THE DAYS OF THE MOB. Writer/penciller, Kirby; inker, Royer.
Below: Art from Paul Power's EAST MEETS WEST #4, all by Mike.


YOUR OWN FRIENDS WHO ARE AGENTS FROM SECURITY H.Q. ARE WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES. LIKE PHILLIP SKY, HAS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED YOUR ASSISTANCE!
PHILLIP SKY? HE'S MY COUSIN!!

INDIANA JONES **Dan Barry** comics. This guy was my icon when I was growing up because of his work on the FLASH GORDON strips. People like Dan and **Stan Drake** were and still are my idols. I recently pencilled a book for Golden Books, a classic Robin Hood, and I asked **Stan Drake** to ink it. I have to admit that I asked him because you kept encouraging me to ask him. I remember **Stan Drake** said to send him a page to ink and that if I liked it, then we'd talk. I thought, "My God, **Stan Drake** is auditioning for me?" Every one of my idols that I've met have turned out to be fabulous people.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

SUPERMAN: SUPER!

David:

Enjoyed issue #120 and your SUPERMAN SUPER SPECIAL with the extra-sized pieces put together in the large Superman book. With the news now of Batman being replaced, however temporarily, in his strips, by an untried newcomer, it is enlightening to see to hear scribes (**Woolfolk, Schwartz,** etc.) describe the early years of Supe's career, particularly the controversial editorial head, **Mort Weisinger.**

Is **Al Plastino** still alive and working in comics? Have you heard anything?

Bill Greer
10903 Wild Grape Drive
San Antonio, TX 78230

HOBGOBLIN OR HOBNAILED BOOT?

Dear DAK,

I had to write you about issue #120, the **Roger Stern** interview, where Roger talks about his vision for the Hobgoblin, and how he didn't have Ned Leeds in mind for Hobgoblin's I.D. I was so happy to read that!! I also felt Marvel muffed it with the mystery of Hobgoblin's identity. The **Stern** Hobgoblin spoke as if he were highly educated, was in a position of power, owned stocks, and generally had a lot more on the ball than Ned Leeds. So from 1983 to 1987 or so, I was really caught up in the mystery, until the lame "unmasking" in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #289. Now, out of the what, 10 million New Yorkers, Hobgoblin ends up being yet another acquaintance of Peter Parker's. Talk about beating the odds! I think we'd better keep a closer watch on Aunt May. She may be Spidey's Doppelganger! Anyway, I wish so much Marvel would give serious thought to a true Hobgoblin origin, or even a mini-series. All I know is I couldn't be the only person supremely disappointed by the way the story turned out.

Rick Cummings
203 S. James
Rome, NY 13440

INDEFENSIBLE — ? NOT WHEN YOU KNOW THE FACTS!

Dear DAK,

As always, the interviews were great reads, especially the **Paul Neary** and **Jim Valentino** interviews — but 56 pages of CATALOG on top of typical ads? Making more than half of the issue ads, ads that take up too much space with cover reproductions, ads that are normally repeated ad nauseam over the course of two or three issues, at $4.95 a pop, is *patently unfair.* Given that #118, a more typical 60-page issue, was a third ads and #120, a 57-page issue, was a fifth ads, meaning that the amount of feature pages approximately the same (roughly 45) as #119, any explanation for the price difference is indefensible. Had I known about the amount of space these ads that I'm sick of seeing took up, I would have waited to buy this until it popped up in a quarter box at some convention. I know that a certain amount of ads are necessary for magazines such as COMICS INTERVIEW to exist, but this is too much.

Before you think I'm all negative, issue #120 was great. It had a balanced lineup of interesting interviews that "felt" as if they weren't scraped from the bottom of the barrel. I saw nothing too obscure (i.e., no interviews of fans), but I'm also glad I didn't see the fourth **Joe Quesada** interview in a month.

Robert Jensen
558 North L St.
Livermore, CA 94550

Gosh, I'm glad you brought up all the right questions, Robert, since in planning the catalog for inclusion in #119, I anticipated that appearances might well prove deceiving and you've given me just the chance I was awaiting to offer some answers. You are quite correct that a certain amount of advertising is good for the magazine — and, we like to think, for the readers, too. But for the more than ten years we've been publishing COMICS INTERVIEW, I've kept a careful account of the ratio of advertising to editorial pages, to ensure that readers always receive their money's worth of inside the industry interviews and info. As the cover price of #119 was a 25% increase over our usual price, I made sure there was a corresponding increase in editorial pages (#119, for example, had fully 50% more editorial pages than #118, for only a 25% increase in price). The advertising catalog was an addition on top of the increase *in editorial content — whether the catalog did or didn't appear in the issue, the amount of increased coverage would have remained the same.*

The catalog was an extra, that's all.

And thanks for the kudos on #120, Robert — we feel that we never *scrape the bottom of the barrel, and we're glad you noticed. I'm also glad you noticed that — while we, too, feel Joe Quesada is worthy of attention — we made a conscious decision not to engage in overkill.*

— DAK

IN DEFENSE OF VINCE

Dear Guys,

I just read your "Jack's Back" issue, and enjoyed it enormously, as I do anything related to The King (the original pencil reproductions, in particular, were amazing). What grated, however, was **Paul Power's** insistent and somewhat infantile denigration of **Vince Colletta's** inking, particularly on THOR. Now, let me say that **Colletta** is hardly my favorite inker, and that when **Kirby's** style really evolved into its final, bold expressionism toward the end of his THOR run, and particularly in his "Fourth World" series, that Vince's inks were detrimental and no longer appropriate.

However, in the mid-Sixties, during **Kirby's** great run on FANTASTIC FOUR and THOR, no one (other than maybe **Mike Royer,** who wasn't around) could have surpassed Vince's inks on THOR. While **Joe Sinnott's** rich and cartoony style was brilliant and perfect for the Science Fiction Superhero fare of the FF, it could never capture the high-blown fantasy of Thor — look at the few times he did ink **Kirby's** Thor, in some issues of the FF, etc. As wonderful an inker as he was, he brought Thor down.

Colletta's style, on the other hand, whether by accident or design, was open and airy, and at its best, just weighty enough, to allow our spirits to fly unhampered through the surreal flow-of-consciousness imagery that bombards us issue after issue of THOR. What it lacks in brute power, **Colletta's** inking makes up for with its subtle and artistic qualities. Admittedly there are times when, in a rush I suppose, Vince's inks are just weak and scratchy — but at his best, **Colletta's** collaboration with **Kirby** resulted in the greatest fantasy comics ever produced.

Boaz Yakin
Fresh Productions, Inc.
375 Greenwich Street — 6th floor
New York, NY 10013

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